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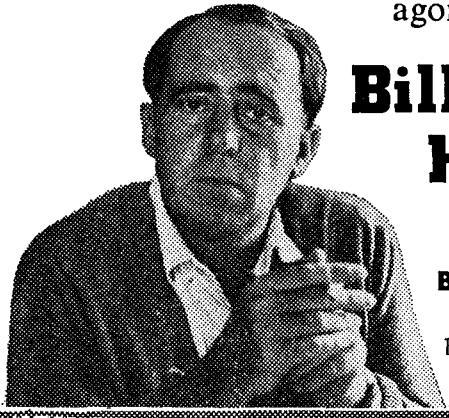

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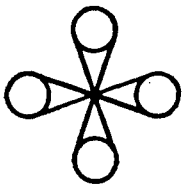

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VERNON WATKINS

Movement of Autumn

Dusk, and the swallows flown,
So late in going.
Secret, from stone to stone,
Water sings, flowing.

Under the year it ran;
Now it is clearer.
Gone are the pipes of Pan.
Winter is nearer.

Symbols are circling you,
Leaf-patterns flying,
All that in Spring was new
Drifting and dying.

Dumb roots are cherishing
In a fresh language
All the leaves perishing,
Sunk into age.

Where the stone dial-figure
Stretches the shade,
Winter the gravedigger
Thrusts with his spade.

Stone will stay proving;
Light goes advancing.
Leaves teach by moving,
Waters by dancing.

What sings the running brook?
Vain without tears were verse.
He who first made the book
Used dying characters.

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Who then has profited
By the year's stream?
He who was buffeted
Out of his dream.

Narrow the water slips
Gently away.
Sealed are Zacchaeus' lips
While the notes play.

Sycamore, sycamore,
Drop your winged keys.
Open the hidden door
None living sees.

When shall the spring of the year
Break from these dolours?
Ask the tree fading here
Under bright colours.

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IRVING HOWE

T. E. Lawrence: The Problem of Heroism

> I wanted only to try to live in obedience to the promptings which came from my true self. Why was that so very difficult?
>
> —*Demian*

TIME HAS MERCIFULLY DULLED the image he despised yet courted: T. E. Lawrence is no longer the idol of the twenties, no longer "Lawrence of Arabia." But for the minority of men to whom reflection upon human existence is both a need and a pleasure, Lawrence seems still to matter. He is not yet a name to be put away in history, a footnote in dust. He continues to arouse sympathy, outrage, excitement. If we come to him admiring whatever in his life was extraordinary, we remain with him out of a sense that precisely the special, even the exotic in Lawrence may illumine whatever in our life is ordinary.

During the early twenties, after his return from Arabia, Lawrence became a national hero, the adventurer through whom Englishmen could once more savor the sensations of war and rescue from its filth emotions of sentimental grandeur. What he had done in Arabia—more important, what he had experienced—was epic in its proportions and even a glance at his life prompts one to speculate about the equivocal nature of heroism in our century. But transplanted from the desert to the lantern-slides of the Albert Hall, where Lowell Thomas was conjuring for the English their stainless version of "Lawrence of Arabia," the whole war-time experience shrank to farce. Partly to salvage it from vulgarities which he himself had condoned, Lawrence wrote *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* a bravura narrative packed with accounts of battle yet finally the record of his search for personal equilibrium and value. By then, however, his public image had acquired a being and momentum of its own. So the book too, though in some ways esoteric, became popular—and helped sustain the image it was meant to subvert.

This sad comedy was to continue to the end. In *The Seven*

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Pillars of Wisdom the ideal of a forthright manly heroism, which Lawrence had supposedly rescued for an unheroic age, was soon transformed into the burden of self-consciousness, a burden he was never to escape. The dynamiter of railroads turned out to be an intellectual harassed by ambition and guilt. The literary man who had read Malory between desert raids and later worried over the shape and rhythm of the sentences in his book, made himself into a pseudonymous recruit tending the "shit-cart" of his camp. And these were but a few of his transfigurations.

I

Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in 1888, the second of five sons in a comfortable Victorian family. The father, a reserved gentleman who is said never to have written a check or read a book, devoted himself to domestic duties and a number of mild sports. The mother, clearly of lower rank, was a strong-spirited Scotch woman, ambitious for her sons, eager to share in their growth, the true psychic center of the family. Mrs. Lawrence raised her boys to be straightforward Christians—and the unambiguous piety with which two of them later met their deaths in the trenches of France must command respect even from those who might prefer a touch of rebellion.

In his youth Lawrence shared the family devoutness, serving briefly as a Sunday school teacher; but whatever mark this religious training left upon him, he refused all formal belief during his adult years. Almost all his biographers have noted strong religious traits in Lawrence, strainings toward some absolute of value by which to brace his conduct. Fewer have remarked on the tacit assumption he shared with many serious persons of our century: that the religious sensibility could be nurtured only in a culture of radical skepticism. (His friend, Eric Kennington, has recorded a conversation in which the adult Lawrence, asked about religion, spoke of a "process without aim or end, creation followed by dissolution, rebirth, and then decay to wonder at and to love. But not a hint of a god and certainly none of the Christian God.")

In a family where all the sons were encouraged to a modest independence of bearing, Ned Lawrence stood out for his nervous boldness, a readiness to risk himself. His escapades and feats of physical endurance, both as a boy and then as a student at Oxford,

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were in part the proofs of strength that a small-bodied person feels obliged to thrust at the world, in part symptoms of a vanity which took the form of needing always to seem original. But these escapades and feats can also be seen as anticipations of his adult view that life is a test through which the human will, to assert its mastery over contingency and pain, denies the flesh not only its desires but its needs.

At some point before entering Oxford in 1907 Lawrence discovered that he and his brothers, apparently the sons of a respectable gentleman, were actually of illegitimate birth. His father, an Anglo-Irish baronet named Sir Thomas Chapman, had left a wife and four daughters in Ireland to run off with a former nurse, the woman who now figured both in public and at home as his wife. In letters written many years later to Mrs. Bernard Shaw—letters that may be read but not quoted—Lawrence would claim that he had known these facts since before the age of ten. Like some of his other stories about his past, this claim seems implausible: a defensive mechanism is at work here.

How deep a shock the discovery of illegitimate birth caused Lawrence, we do not really know. To what extent it should be regarded as a source of his sense of "homelessness" during the later years and his need to keep asserting himself in a series of new identities—this question demands speculation but permits no firm conclusion. One may see in the boy's discovery a matrix for those predispositions to suffering which would mark the later Lawrence. Or one may see it as a blow to his pride. But it is surely a vast simplification to claim, as does Richard Aldington in his venomous biography, that Lawrence received a wound that would cripple him for life. The bare facts—his gift for leadership, his success in winning the loyalty of distinguished men, his ability to complete a major literary work—all show that Lawrence was not permanently disabled by the effects of this adolescent trauma, if trauma it was. I add this last qualification because we must allow for the possibility that whatever pain the revelation caused him, Ned Lawrence, as an English boy raised on romantic notions and books, might have felt it *interesting* to have a father capable of such unconventional behavior in behalf of love.

Large parts of the boy's experience were intellectually vital and traditionally wholesome. A fondness for history led him to take

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bicycle trips through the south of England and make rubbings of monumental brasses. On his bedroom walls were pasted life-size portraits of knights who had performed heroic deeds in the Crusades. He devoured the medieval romances of William Morris with a relish that—hard as it may be for us to grasp—he would retain throughout his life. He attended lectures by Flinders Petrie that helped spark his interest in antiquities.

During the summers of 1906, 1907, 1908, on bicycle trips through France, Ned Lawrence visited cathedrals and castles, made careful notes, and wrote letters to his mother which, if a trifle too "composed," are still notable for an exactness of observation and phrasing beyond the usual capacity of an eighteen or nineteen-year-old boy. In the summer of 1909 he undertook a more adventurous trip: a walking tour of Syria, the interior of which was almost inaccessible to Europeans. His purpose was to prepare an Oxford thesis on the Crusaders' castles. When he inquired about Syria from C. M. Doughty, whose *Arabia Deserta* he knew and loved, the older man sent back a note advising that the journey would be too risky. "Long daily marches," warned Doughty, "a prudent man who knows the country would consider out of the question." But Lawrence went.

Suffering heat, fever and a beating at the hands of a thief, Lawrence tramped eleven hundred miles through Syria, an average of twenty a day when on the move. He lived with Arab village families, ate *leben,* the Syrian yoghurt, and bread "almost leathery when fresh." He photographed some fifty castles, establishing to his own satisfaction the main point of his thesis.

Perhaps for the first time we come upon qualities in Lawrence that may be considered remarkable:—an intense fascination with the past, a ruthless insistence upon seeing things for himself, a readiness to submit to the customs of a strange, often hostile people, an eagerness to pursue an idea or action to its extreme limits. And something else, still more important: In Syria Lawrence came to feel the hypnotic pull of an utterly alien style of life, one that was almost the antipode of Western civilization. Toward the Arabs he would now be drawn by ties both stronger and less tender —certainly more abstract—than love. As he wrote a few years later to a friend: "You guessed right that the Arab appealed to my imagination. It is the old, old civilization which has refined itself

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clear of household gods, and half the trappings which ours hasten to assume."

By his twenty-first year Lawrence was beginning to think seriously about a career in archaeology—though whether he thought seriously about the close work required by archaeological scholarship is another matter. Through the help of D. G. Hogarth, Lawrence became attached in 1910 to a British Museum expedition that was to dig at Carchemish on the banks of the Euphrates. For most of the next three years—the happiest of his life, he called them—Lawrence worked as an assistant, miscellaneous, nimble and erratic, to the head of the expedition, first Hogarth and then Leonard Woolley.

At Carchemish Lawrence formed a close—and as it seems in retrospect, significant—friendship with Sheik Hamoudi, the foreman of the dig; and when he took another hike through Syria in the summer of 1911, which ended in bouts of fever and dysentery, it was Hamoudi who nursed him back to life. "He is our brother," the Arab would later say about Lawrence, "our friend and leader. He is one of us." *One of us:* a tribute that would have pleased Lawrence, amused him in its distance from truth, and finally disturbed him. For in stumbling upon Conrad's famous phrase, which for us evokes the whole tangle of fraternity and aloneness in human relationships, Hamoudi touched unwittingly upon the problem of bad faith that would torment Lawrence throughout his time in Arabia.

One fact more about the early Lawrence: In January 1914, as the world hurried toward war, he and Woolley went off on a trip through the area that runs south of Gaza and Beersheba and east of Akaba, ostensibly to retrace the routes of Biblical journeys for the Palestine Expeditionary Fund, actually to provide the British army with maps of a zone under Turkish sovereignty. For once there is justice in a complaint by Richard Aldington: "None of the intellectuals writing on Lawrence has expressed the faintest regret or indignation at this official abuse of science and religion to screen politico-military activities. . . ." Had Lawrence been anything but a man of austere moral sensibilities, this "official abuse," not the worst deed of our century, would hardly be worth noticing. Had he justified it in the name of military need, criticism might be given pause. But what disturbs one is that there was a side of

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Lawrence—the eternal British undergraduate with his sneaking admiration for "public school" pranks—that would regard such an incident as a lark. If the essential Lawrence was a man whose ordeal in Arabia burned every bit of pomp out of him, there was another Lawrence, a Kiplingesque schoolboy susceptible to romantic vanities about the mission of England, who was never quite to disappear. During the war years this other Lawrence would break out in a giggling superciliousness toward those military men he found dense and an equally callow adulation of those, like Allenby, he found enlightened. And who knows? Perhaps without this lesser Lawrence we should not have had the man who would come to write *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

II

In the spring of 1916 Sherif Hussein of the Hejaz, descendent of the Prophet and protector of the faith, launched a revolt against the Turks. For some time the British had been tempting him with promises of post-war independence; but this shrewd fanatic had played a cautious game, rightly enough from his point of view, since he neither trusted the infidel British nor cared to risk the vengeance of the Turks.

At first the Arabs gained a few local victories, hardly decisive and, in their very success, exposing a poverty of purpose and leadership. But having lost the advantage of surprise and unable, with their irregular bands, to do more than harass entrenched Turkish posts, they now faced the danger of being wiped out by counterattack. The Arabs were ignorant of modern warfare; they had no master plan and barely an idea of why one might be needed; their main advantage lay not in any capacities of their own but in the sluggishness of the Turks. To provide help and soothe Hussein, British headquarters in Cairo sent an experienced official, Ronald Storrs, as envoy to the Hejaz. With him went T. E. Lawrence, who until then had spent the war months as an impudent and quite undistinguished staff captain in Military Intelligence.

In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* Lawrence has left a brilliant description of his first exploratory visit from one Arab camp to another, studying Hussein's three elder sons, each of whom led a body of troops. Ali, Abdullah, Feisal: which of these princes could

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become the focal point of rebellion, the embodiment of Arab desire? The picture of Lawrence plunging into the chaos of the Arab world, measuring the worth of its leaders and quickly bringing order to its ranks—this picture is surely overdrawn if one judges by the limited powers Lawrence actually enjoyed at the moment. Not until after his return to Cairo and his assignment as British Liaison officer to the Arab troops in the winter of 1917 did he even begin to command such authority. Yet the picture is essentially faithful if one grants Lawrence the right—he won it in the desert and then through his book—to treat his own experience as fable of heroism: the right, that is, to assign a scheme or purpose to hesitant improvisations which in the end did come to bear such a purpose.

It was Hussein's third son Feisal, decided Lawrence, who could serve as the "armed prophet" of revolt: Feisal, "very tall and pillar-like," who displayed a posture of assurance and a patience for mediating tribal feuds. And it had better be added: Feisal responsive to the cues of this darting little Englishman with his "kitchen Arabic," his love for flamboyant dress, his curious pleasure in bending himself to the ritual and guile of Arab politics.

The speed with which Lawrence now became a political and military leader of the revolt is astonishing, yet not difficult to explain. Between the xenophobic suspicions of the Arabs, who saw infidels descending upon them, and the routine military outlook of the British, who saw inefficiency all about them—which is to say, between two kinds of narrow-mindedness, each reflecting the limitations of a different century and culture—there arose in the Hejaz a vacuum of leadership. For the revolt to survive, that vacuum had to be filled. And it could be filled only by a man able to endow it with a coherent idea such as would appeal both to the predatory caution and reckless fanaticism of the Arabs.

The idea Lawrence first brought to the Arab revolt was not primarily a military one; nor did it yet have in his private reflections those metaphysical bearings that would later absorb him. Lawrence began by approaching the revolt not as a partisan but as a strategist. He approached it as a problem in dynamics: what was needed to move these people into action and, given their notorious inconstancy, to keep them in action? what kind of enterprise could they reasonably be expected to assume and complete? To ask such

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questions was to enter the realm of politics, not as an ideational system but as a make-shift theory of national psychology.

The tribal Arabs with whom Lawrence had now to deal, unlike the city intelligentsia and middle class of Syria, had almost no tradition of nationalism; they knew at best glimmers and anticipations of national feeling. The Arabs were not a nation at all; they were remnants and shards of what might once have been a nation; they contained perhaps the elements from which a nation might be forged. But Lawrence could not wait (nor could the Arabs) until they became one; he could only think of a course of action which, if they were enabled to pursue it with some freedom, would stir the Arabs into behaving *as if* they were a nation.

What might bring this about? Primarily the belief that they could or should be a nation; a burgeoning sense of their possibilities, such as they themselves could barely express; and a strategy of conflict that pressed them into momentary coherence without risking the full-scale warfare for which they were not prepared, since they were as quick to drop into discouragement as to flare into high passion. Lawrence had to improvise a strategy of national politics for a cluster of tribes that neither was a nation nor had a politics. He had to find symbols and tactics for transforming their primitive antagonism to the Turks into a facsimile of a modern purpose: but a modern purpose that could retain its thrust only by drawing upon the sources of the primitive resentment.

Such considerations were obviously beyond the reach of most British officers, who saw only the noisy surface of Arab chaos and felt therefore that the best policy would be to bring in a sizable body of disciplined European troops. The French mission in the Hejaz, understanding Lawrence better, feared him more. It knew that any mobilization of Arab consciousness, no matter how useful at the moment, would threaten the structure of Allied power in the mid-East. No wonder that Lawrence complained in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* about the "blindness of European advisors, who would not see that rebellion was not war; indeed, was more of the nature of peace—a national strike perhaps." The moment Lawrence understood this, he was ready for his task.

In so reconstructing his situation, I do not mean to imply that Lawrence fully understood the workings of Arab society and religion, or the role of colonial rivalries among the great powers, or

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the general problem of nationalism in our century. Far from it. But what he grasped with absolute mastery was that the revolt could succeed only if it wore the face of freedom, only if it used the language of autonomy, only if it became a cause. To become a cause, it would have to be fought mainly by the Arabs themselves and appear to be led mainly by the Arabs themselves. Upon the tribal rivalries, the greed, the religious particularism of the Arabs there would have to be grafted a facade of unity: from which, if skillful enough, there might yet come the reality of national existence.

Lawrence was not deluded. He understood that the nationalism of the colonial countries was often devious and venal; that today's oppressed might be tomorrow's oppressors; that once freedom was won there might follow a moral relapse which would make the whole effort seem a waste. But he also sensed that meanwhile there lay imbedded in this nationalism an unformed yearning for dignity. If, for a time, the Arabs could be brought to act by this yearning, the revolt might succeed. If not, it would fail.

Lawrence saw the revolt in its political wholeness and moral dynamism: not merely as it was, fouled by intrigue, cupidity and narrowness of spirit, but as it might become, an ideal possibility. He possessed the vision which, historically, was the Arabs' privilege: that was a cause for elation. He knew they could not sustain his vision: that was a cause for despair. Balancing elation and despair, Lawrence, while still below thirty, reached full knowledge of the burdens of leadership.

Am I here endowing Lawrence with a coherence he would later claim but never really possess? Or assigning to him perceptions he would reach, if at all, only after the event? The record of his work and writings must stand as answer, but consider at least this sequence of passages, written before, during and immediately after the revolt:

1915

I want to pull them all [the "little powers" of Arabia] together, & to roll up Syria by way of the Hejaz in the name of the Sherif. You know how big his repute is in Syria . . . we can rush right up to Damascus, & biff the French out of all hope of Syria. It's a big game. . . . (From a letter to D. G. Hogarth)

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1916
A difference in character between the Turkish and Arab armies is that the more you distribute the former the weaker they become, and the more you distribute the latter the stronger they become. (From *The Arab Bulletin*)

1917
The Arab movement is a curious thing. It is really very small and weak in its beginning, and anybody who had command of the sea could put an end to it in three or four days. It has capacity for expansion however—in the same degree—over a very wide area. It is as though you imagine a nation or agitation that may be very wide, but never very deep, since all the Arab countries are agricultural or pastoral, and all poor today. . . .

On the other hand the Arab movement is shallow, not because the Arabs do not care, but because they are few—and in their smallness of numbers (which is imposed by their poverty of country) lies a good deal of their strength, for they are perhaps the most elusive enemy an army ever had. . . . It is indiscreet only to ask what Arabia is. It has an East and a West and a South Border—but where or what it is on the top no man knoweth. I fancy it is up to the Arabs to find out! (From a letter to his parents)

1920
. . . but suppose we were an influence (as we might be), an idea, a thing invulnerable, intangible, without front or back, drifting about like a gas? Armies were like plants, immobile as a whole, firm-rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind, and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so perhaps we offered nothing material to the killing.

. . . The Turk . . . would believe that rebellion was absolute, like war, and deal with it on the analogy of absolute warfare. Analogy is fudge, anyway, and to make war upon rebellion is slow and messy, like eating soup with a knife.

. . . We had seldom to concern ourselves with what our men did, but much with what they thought. . . . We had won a province when we had taught the civilians in it to die for our ideal of freedom; the presence or absence of the enemy was a secondary matter. (From "The Evolution of a Revolt")

These passages chart Lawrence's growing mastery of statement, but far more important, a development of thought and value almost to the point of establishing him as a new person. First, the simple-minded scheme for "biffing" the French. In 1917 the nota-

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tion of a newly-seen complexity: a notation somewhat distant, neutral, but not unsympathetic. And finally the last statement, which Lawrence would work into *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* rising to an earned and measured eloquence: the revolt as idea, as undefiled conception. Yet this pattern is surely too neat, for Lawrence did not shed his earlier views, he buried them beneath his later ones. And the further qualification must be added that if the last passage gives us the essence of what the revolt could still mean to Lawrence,—for by 1920 it often turned to ashes in his mouth,—the earlier passages provide essential evidence as to its less exalted realities.

In regard to so complex and elusive a mind as Lawrence's, no simple distinction can be enforced between action and response, what "really" happened and what he made of it in memory. Lawrence neither was nor could be a detached observer; he was leader, follower, victim all in one. He tells us that his first commanding view of the revolt came to him in March 1917 when for ten days he lay sick in the camp of Abdulla. Perhaps, in writing *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* Lawrence gave dramatic form to his memories by condensing a long experience of discovery into a moment of sudden realization. But this possibility should not be allowed to blur the fact that there was discovery. Even in Arabia history is not all muddle or chance; there *is* intelligence, plan, purpose. And to the extent that these were present in the revolt, they were significantly Lawrence's: not his alone, but his most forcefully.

It is possible that the innovations in military tactics claimed for Lawrence were neither so revolutionary nor calculated as has been supposed—though by now only specialists and old friends will have strong opinions about Lawrence as commander. It is possible that a good many of his glamorous desert raids were of uncertain value—though in guerilla warfare bold acts can have consequences beyond their immediate military effects. It is possible that without British gold Lawrence could not have held together the Arab chieftains—though the crucial question is whether anyone else could have done it with twice as much gold. But one thing seems certain: it was Lawrence who grasped the inner logic of the revolt as a moral-political act and it was Lawrence who breathed into it a vibrancy of intention it had not previously known.

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What his plunge into the desert meant to Lawrence he never fully said, perhaps because the main concern in his writings was to present his relations to the Arabs as a problem—a problem that could not be reduced to his private needs or desires.[1] From fragments of evidence left by Lawrence and those who were close to him, one may cautiously reconstruct some of his responses.

Lawrence, the cocky young officer who had been disliked so fiercely by the military regulars in Cairo, saw the Arabian campaign as an adventure in the simplest, most *English* sense of the word. This Lawrence took eagerly to the whole ritual-pageant of the Arab camps and Arab ceremonies and Arab pow-wows, though he knew that half the time they were mere displays veiling weakness. This Lawrence suddenly found himself cast in a role such as might satisfy the wildest fantasies of a middle class English youth raised on romantic literature. With a sharp eye for stylized effects, he continued in his own way the tradition of those English visitors to the mid-East who have managed to penetrate native life without ceasing to be immaculately English.

He loved to ride with Feisal at the head of a racing camel army. He loved to dress in spotless white robes, sometimes scarlet and white. He loved to sit in Feisal's tent, gravely listening and dropping an occasional word during negotiations with tribal chiefs who were edging toward the Arab cause. He loved to compete with Auda Abu Tayi, leading sheik of the Howeitat, a warrior out of the barbaric past. And he took a special delight in acquiring for himself a bodyguard of dark-skinned Ageyl fighters who formed a legion obedient to his command. An English officer, meeting Lawrence at Akada in 1918, found him

> . . . a small man dressed in extremely good and expensive Bedouin clothes, a richly braided and decorated goat's hair cloak over all, and on his head a wonderful silk kufaiyeh held in position by a gold agal. His feet were bare, and he had a gold Hejazi dagger in his belt. . . .

But even to act out this somewhat operatic role, Lawrence had to pay so terrible a price that one comes to disregard the flash and

[1] Some private desires there surely were. *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* bears a a fervid dedication in verse to "S.A.," who has generally been taken to be an Arabian person Lawrence knew before the war. It has also been surmised, on the basis of teasing hints dropped by Lawrence to his biographers, that one motive for wishing to undertake the campaign in the desert was to reach "S.A." But whether this person was, as Robert Graves insists, a woman Lawrence had met in Syria or whether it was the Arab boy Sheik Ahmoud whom he had befriended at Carchemish, we do not know. There are other possibilities, but they are little more than guesses.

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histrionics. From his return to the Hejaz until the day the British and Arabs entered Damascus, Lawrence accepted an appalling quantity of hardship. He learned to walk barefoot on hot sands with the aplomb of an Arab; to ride camels on lacerating marches; to go for days without food and then plunge his fingers into fatty stews; to show a contempt for pain which would win the respect of the most savage tribesman; to yield his body to exhaustion and then force it once again to war; to be on guard against those who might betray him for gold or wish him out of the way so they might pillage without check; to witness, often in necessary silence, repeated outbursts of cruelty (for the Arab's "sterile experience robbed him of compassion and perverted his human kindness to the image of the waste in which he hid.") And there were other, more intimate causes of suffering.

Lawrence never wished to persuade the Arabs that he had become one of them. That would not only have been ludicrous, it would have threatened his mode of leadership. He did something more subtle and, in their eyes, impressive: he convinced the Arabs that in basic stoicism, outer bearing and daily practise he could become remarkably like them. The dream of "going back," of stripping to a more primitive self, which has so often fascinated Western man, was an authentic motive in his Arabian experience; but it was also consciously used by Lawrence to further his public role.

For a man who was so deeply drawn to the experience of *overcoming*—particularly a self-overcoming in the sense foreshadowed by Nietzsche—the war in Arabia came to be a test through radical humiliation and pain.

As he immersed himself in the life of the desert, repeating again and again the cycle of exertion—a moment of high excitement, a plunge into activity, then sickness, self-scrutiny, the wild desire to escape and finally a clenched return—Lawrence saw his experience as far more than a romantic escapade or fearful discipline. Since, in the bareness of the desert he had to remold his existence in order to meet an historical demand, he also found there the possibility of an action through which to carve out a chosen meaning for his life. From the trivia, the ugliness, the absurdity, the assured betrayal of events, he would snatch the trophy of freedom.

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In themselves courage and pain meant very little; men were being killed in France who also knew pain and showed courage. But they were mere dumb bodies led to slaughter. Lawrence, however, found himself in a situation where he might determine the character of his experience—or so it seemed to him in occasional moments of lucidity. To help make the Arabs into a free people was a task worthy of an ambitious man. To help steer the revolt past an enemy that would destroy it and allies that would disarm it, was a challenge worthy of a serious man. The fighting, to be sure, brought moments when such visions seemed utterly fatuous. There were wretched little raids in which he had to use all his strength just to keep his forces from disintegrating, since the Arabs, indifferent to consequences, took pillage as the natural fruit of victory. There was the despair that followed a discovery that Zeid, Feisal's younger brother, had stupidly squandered a large sum of money and imperilled the revolt. There was the shock of learning that Auda, disgruntled in his greed, had entered secret negotiations with the Turks. But through it all Lawrence kept hoping that he might do something fine in the desert, perhaps something extraordinary.

He seized upon the Arabian campaign as an occasion for heroism not merely or primarily as it meant courage and recklessness, but as it meant the possibility for stamping intelligence and value upon a segment of history. To leave behind the settled life of middle class England which seemed to offer little but comfort and destruction; to abandon the clutter of routine by which a man can fill his days, never knowing his capacity for sacrifice or courage; to break with the assumption that life consists merely of waiting for things to happen; to carve out an experience which, in the words of Georg Simmel, would "determine its beginning and end according to its own formative power"—these were the yearnings that Lawrence discovered in the revolt. And these are the motifs of his conduct that have made him so attractive to an age in which the capacities for heroism seem constantly to diminish.

Put aside the posturing and play-acting, put aside the embroidered robes and gold daggers, and there still remains the possibility of that rare action by which a man, rising above the limitations of moment and place, reaches the heart of excellence—a possibility, as Lawrence knew, that comes but rarely and must be

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seized with total desire, if seized at all. In the words of the hero of Malraux's *The Royal Way,* he wished to "put a scar on the map."

It is also in this sense, so utterly unlike the one I noticed a page or two back, that Lawrence undertook the Arabian campaign as an adventure: the sense, in Simmel's words, that an adventure is like a work of art, "for the essence of the work of art is . . . that it cuts out a piece of endlessly continuous sequence of perceived experience, giving it a self-sufficient form as though defined and held together by an inner core. . . . Indeed, it is an attribute of this form to make us feel that in both the work of art and the adventure the whole of life is somehow comprehended and consummated." Exactly what Lawrence came to hope for in the desert: that somehow, through an unimaginable exertion, the whole of his life would be comprehended and consummated.

At one decisive point, however, Lawrence's career turns sharply from the pattern suggested by Simmel. "The adventurer of genius," writes Simmel, "lives, as if by mystic instinct, at the point where the course of the world and the individual fate have, so to speak, not yet been differentiated from one another." About Lawrence this was not true, and everything that led him to think of his experience in Arabia as an imposture shows it could not be true. Consider the qualities implied by Simmel when he evokes the hero or, as he prefers to call him, "the adventurer of genius." The hero is a man with a belief in his inner powers, a confidence that he moves in rhythm with natural and historic forces, a conviction that he has been chosen for his part and thereby lifted above personal circumstances. At moments Lawrence felt one or another of these, but surely not with classic fulfillment or ease. Though his "individual fate" was indeed yoked to "the course of the world," in the end the two moved in profound opposition to one another.

Lawrence found it hard to believe in the very deeds he drove himself to perform. His apparent fulfillment of the hero's traditional tasks was undercut at every point by a distrust and mockery of the idea of heroism. He could not yield himself to his own *charisma;* he was never certain of those secret gifts which for the hero ought to be an assured possession; he lived on the nerve's edge of consciousness, forever tyrannized by questions.

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At the end he abandoned his adventure with a feeling that inaction might be the most desirable of states and a desire to transform heroism into a discipline for the purging of self.

Is it fanciful to think that we have here a distinctly "modern" kind of heroism? So it seemed to Herbert Read when he reviewed *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in 1928. "About the epic hero," wrote Read, "there is an essential undoubting directness . . . essentially he is self-possessed, self-reliant, arrogant, unintelligent. Colonel Lawrence was none of these. . . . He was a lame duck in an age of lame ducks; a soldier spoilt by introspection and self-analysis; a man with a load on his mind . . . [Lawrence's mind was] not great with thought, but tortured with some restless spirit that drives it out into the desert, to physical folly and self-immolation, a spirit that never triumphs over the body and never attains peace." Except for the ungenerous phrase about "physical folly," Read was here both accurate and perceptive. He meant his remarks as a partial depreciation, but they point, I think, to the very ground for our continued interest in Lawrence. By now it is almost impossible to accept as a model of the heroic the sort of divine ox Read claimed to admire. For better or worse, the hero as he appears in the tangle of modern life is a man struggling with a vision he can neither realize nor abandon, "a man with a load on his mind."

As Lawrence assumed greater burdens of responsibility in the desert campaign, his feeling that he had become a creature apart, isolated from both the Arabs and English, kept steadily growing. So too did his need to subject himself to the cruelest accusations. Some of Lawrence's difficulties were of a personal character and would have troubled him, though perhaps less violently, even if he had never come to Arabia; others followed from the very nature of warfare. All of them converging, they forced him into a mode of life that has recently come to be described as the experience of extreme situations.

In the fall of 1917, during a scouting expedition into enemy territory, Lawrence was captured by the Turks at Deraa. Fortunately, he was not recognized but was taken to be a deserter and brought before the local commandant, "a bulky man [who] sat on the bed in a night gown, trembling and sweating as though with fever. . . ." There followed a scene in which physical torture

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and sexual violation merged in a blur of pain. Later, in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* Lawrence would describe it with a cold, almost clinical hysteria.

> I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up. . . . I remembered smiling at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was swelling through me: and then that he flung up his arm and hacked the full length of his whip into my groin. This doubled me half-over, screaming, or, rather, trying impotently to scream, only shuddering through my open mouth. One giggled with amusement. A voice cried, 'Shame, you've killed him.' Another slash followed. A roaring, and my eyes went black: while within me the core of life seemed to heave slowly up through the rending nerves. . . .

The two or three pages which recapture Lawrence's ordeal at Deraa anticipate a library of recollections by the victims of modern totalitarianism. Few are more terrible than Lawrence's, though even in this extreme self-exposure, where he was so honest about that side of himself which sought for masochistic pain, he could not quite bring himself to be candid about the completeness of the violation. From it he never fully recovered; for years he would impress people as a man battling his nerves to maintain the appearance of control.

The incident at Deraa would have been enough to break stronger and more secure men, but one reason it so tortured Lawrence in memory has to do with his sexual life. That Lawrence never had what we would today call a normal relationship with a woman, seems an incontrovertible fact. He shied away from women unless they were notably maternal, and his repeated expressions of disgust concerning the sexual act—he once called marriage "prostitution *a la carte*"—go far beyond the bounds of timidity or fastidiousness. Whether Lawrence was a practising homosexual it is not possible to say with any authority: the evidence of his friends ranges from genuine bewilderment to special pleading. There are passages in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* which show that Lawrence was drawn to the idea or image of homosexuality as it occurred, with apparent simplicity and purity, among his young Arab warriors. But if, as one suspects, his sexual impulses were usually passive and suppressed, that would have been all the more reason for suffering a poignant sense of isolation in the desert, where he was thrown into an ex-

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clusively male society and the habits of the Bedouins were accepted without fuss or judgment.

There were other, more public reasons for his despair. By the summer of 1917 he knew about the Sykes-Picot treaty, a secret arrangement among Britain, France and Russia for perpetuating imperialism in the mid-East. This agreement made a farce of the promises of independence that had been given by Lawrence—though not by him alone—to the Arabs. Lawrence smarted under the knowledge that no matter what he would now say or do, he had no choice but to further this deceit. He had hoped, as he flamboyantly wrote in the suppressed preface to *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* "to restore a lost influence, to give 20 millions of Semites the foundations on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts." The reality, which made him all the sicker as he became a legendary figure among the Arabs, was "a homesickness [which] came over me stressing vividly my outcast life among the Arabs, while I exploited their highest ideals, and made their love of freedom one more tool to make England win." And when, at a moment of climax in the Arabian campaign, Lawrence delivered a "halting, half-coherent speech" to the Serahin tribe—

> There could be no rest-houses for revolt, no dividend of joy paid out. Its spirit was accretive, to endure as far as the senses would endure, and to use each such advance as base for further adventure, deeper privation, sharper pain. . . . To be of the desert was, as they knew, to wage unending battle with an enemy who was not of the world, nor life, nor anything, but hope itself; and failure seemed God's freedom to mankind. . . . Death would seem best of all our works, the last free loyalty within our grasp, our final leisure. . . .

—he was speaking from the center of his new beliefs, assaulting his listeners at the point where he could make "their worldliness fade," but also, as he felt, enticing them further into a net of deception.

Lawrence knew the Arabs had been selfish, narrow, treacherous all through the campaign—but wondered whether, in the light of self-interest, they had not been justified. He knew Doughty had been right in saying the Arabs had "a presumptuous opinion of themselves, yet [also] a high indolent fantasy distempered with melancholy. . . ." Victory, wrote Lawrence, "always undid an Arab

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force." Ibn Saud's empire, he remarked after the war, "is a figment built on sand. Nothing static will rise in the desert, which has seen hundreds of such tyrannies as his. . . ." In a fine sentence in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* he displayed the tangle of his feelings toward the Arabs: "The Arab respected force a little: he respected craft more, and often had it in an enviable degree: but most of all he respected blunt sincerity of utterance, nearly the sole weapon God had excluded from his armament."

Had Lawrence been a principled anti-imperialist for whom sentiments of national pride were irrelevant, his problem might have been easier to bear. But he was not a principled anti-imperialist and he did retain sentiments of national pride. In fact, his shame and guilt derived precisely from a lingering belief in the British claim to fairness. Despite superb intuitions, he never reached a coherent view of the world political struggle in which, finally, he too was but another pawn. There were moments when he saw, but he could not long bear the vision, that his whole adventure had been absorbed by a cynical struggle for power. Lawrence was a man—hopeless, old-fashioned romantic!—who believed in excellence and honor; he came at the wrong time, in the wrong place.

On his thirtieth birthday, during a peaceful day shortly before the entry into Damascus, Lawrence tried to examine himself honestly, without delusion:

> Four years ago I had meant to be a general and knighted when thirty. Such temporal dignities (if I survived the next four weeks) were now in my grasp. . . . There was a craving to be famous; and a horror of being known to like being known. . . . The hearing other people praised made me despair jealously of myself. . . . I began to wonder if all established reputations were founded, like mine, on fraud. . . . I must have had some tendency, some aptitude, for deceit. Without that I should not have deceived men so well, and persisted two years in bringing to success a deceit which others had framed and set afoot. . . .

As it now seemed to him, almost everything he had done was negligible in scale and value, a triviality of success. This judgment he would later express most forcibly in the preface he wrote for *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* and the summary of this preface that André Malraux has provided might almost have been written by Lawrence himself:

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> . . . he was carried away at first by the appeal of liberty and was so completely committed to its service that he ceased to exist; he lived under the constant threat of torture; his life was ceaselessly crossed by *strange longings fanned by privations and dangers;* he was incapable of subscribing to the doctrines he preached for the good of his country at war . . . he ceased to believe in his civilization or in any other, until he was aware of nothing but an intense solitude on the borderline of madness; and what he chiefly recalled were *the agony, the terrors and the mistakes.*

When the British and Arabs marched into Damascus, the war came to an end for Lawrence. "In the black light of victory, we could scarcely identify ourselves."

III

Lawrence returned to England in November 1918, hoping, as he had written to his friend Vyvyan Richards, for "a long quiet like a purge and then a contemplation and decision of future roads." Nothing of the sort proved to be possible. The Versailles peace conference was a few months away; Feisal would be coming, ill-prepared and vulnerable; the Arab cause required pleading. Time and again Lawrence found himself wishing to shake off his responsibilities to the Arabs, who seemed far less admirable in peace than in war. It was not hard to surmise by now the order of civilization they would be bringing to the mid-East: a mixture of the worst of several possible worlds. But having yielded himself to an historical action, Lawrence felt that as a matter of honor he had to see it through.

He remained, to all appearances, a figure coiled with energy and purpose. His mind was never more supple than during these months in which he prepared to sabotage French and then British ambitions. But in his writings of the period—the impression is strengthened by memoirs of his friends—one gains a sense of teeth clenched, hands tightened, a weariness beyond measure: as if he were trying to complete a necessary task and then lapse into silence.

In England Lawrence sent a memorandum to the cabinet proposing the creation of several independent Arab states, with Hussein's sons as limited monarchs and with moderate guidance and help to come from the West. That the Arabs were not ready for independence, Lawrence knew quite well; no long-suppressed

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people ever is, except as it breaks past the limits of its suppression. Lawrence reached the core of the problem in an article he published in 1920: "We have to be prepared to see [the Arabs] doing things by methods quite unlike our own, and less well; but on principle it is better that they half-do it than that we do it perfectly for them."

Lawrence realized that his proposal would be bitterly fought by the French, if only because it allowed independence to the Syrian coastal area which the Sykes-Picot treaty had reserved for France. He understood that the British, to gain any peace at all, would have to compromise with their main ally. What he did not forsee—and here one may charge him with political naivete—was that strong voices in England would be eager to work out an arrangement giving Syria to the French and in turn allowing Britain to dominate Iraq.

At the peace conference his status was ambiguous. Formally he acted as advisor to the British delegation; actually, in the words of the Swedish writer Erik Lönnroth, he "functioned as representative of several Arab states which did not yet exist, and whose still vague contours he himself had greatly helped to form." The French, by now well briefed on his opinions and temper, treated him with frigid correctness. "If he comes as a British colonel, in an English uniform," read the instructions of the French foreign minister, "we will welcome him. But we will not accept him as an Arab. . . ." Yet it was precisely "as an Arab" that Lawrence did come, to badger and court Lloyd George, Balfour, Colonel House and even Clemenceau.

As negotiations dragged into the summer of 1919, it became clear that the British had decided to let France take Syria; in the labyrinth of cynicism and interest that would comprise the Versailles treaty, this was a small part of the bargain. The Arabs, sensing defeat, began to put up a show of truculence, notably in a popular congress held in Syria which proclaimed Feisal its head and independence its goal. The French, determined on a stern policy, were itching to drive Feisal's troops out of Damascus. And Lawrence, alone and powerless, grew increasingly estranged from his countrymen.

In the spring he had taken an airplane flight to Cairo with the intention of collecting his notes for *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom,*

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and when the plane crashed near Rome, had suffered a broken collarbone and rib fractures. The painful accident, together with the recent death of his father and the crumbling of his hopes at Versailles, brought him to a state close to nervous exhaustion. It was now his predicament that as his reputation grew, his capacities declined. When the French heard of the flight to Cairo, they set up a panicky cry that he was returning to the mid-East to lead an Arab resistance; in reality, Lawrence was in no condition to lead anything. As he returned to Paris, all he could do was persist in a quixotic loyalty to the Arabs, a loyalty resting more on principle than affection. And this stubbornness—let us call it by its true name: this absolute unwillingness to sell out—began to strike his British colleagues as *unreasonable,* an embarrassment in the diplomacy of Versailles.

Lawrence kept searching for possibilities to maneuver. He appealed to the Americans in the name of self-determination; wrote pleading notes to the English leaders; sent a letter to the London *Times* arguing the Arab case and declaring—though this the editor did not print—that he regretted his war-time actions since the British government clearly had no intention of living up to the promises it had authorized him to make the Arabs. But it was hopeless, a lost cause. "By the mandate swindle," as Lawrence later said, "England and France got the lot." What Lawrence now felt came to far more than personal disappointment; it was a rupture of those bonds of faith that had made him a good and, in some respects, characteristic Englishman of his day. Now he "looked at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me." In the suppressed introduction to *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* Lawrence poured out his heart with a bitterness that spoke for a generation:

> We were wrought up with ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for. We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves any good or evil: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took from us our victory and remade it in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth could win, but had not learned to keep, and was pitiably weak against age. We stammered that we had worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us kindly and made their peace.

By the end of 1919 the strain had become too great. Lawrence

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told himself that he had failed, perhaps betrayed, the Arabs. He harassed himself mercilessly in the writing of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. And then, at the very moment of failure, he was thrust into public notoriety through Lowell Thomas' illustrated lecture, "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia," a spectacle that in London alone drew over a million adoring spectators. Lawrence became a popular legend—cheap and vulgar—through the devices of a skillful journalist.

But also, one must add, through his own connivance: a connivance in which vanity and masochism joined to betray him. "I'm a sublimated Aladdin, the thousand and second Knight, a Strand-Magazine strummer," moaned Lawrence in early 1920, for he was far too intelligent not to see what Thomas was doing to him. Yet he failed to correct the numerous distortions, even after Hubert Young, his war-time companion, protested Thomas' statement that the British officers in Arabia had not accompanied Lawrence to the front. And he went to hear Thomas' lecture at least five times, apparently relishing his transformation into "a Strand-Magazine strummer." When "spotted," reports Thomas, "he would turn crimson, laugh in confusion, and hurry away with a stammered word of apology."

How was this possible? Why did Lawrence permit and even encourage Thomas to continue? There is no single answer, only a complex of possible reasons. The vaudeville in which Lawrence was cast as prince of the desert, served as a balm to feelings that had been hurt at Versailles: there was pleasure of a kind in being recognized at the Albert Hall and stared at in the streets. His new public role appealed to his sense of the sardonic, his sense of the distance between hidden truth and outer parody. It stimulated a kind of self-mortification, a twisting of the knife of public shame still deeper into the wounds of his ego. But at best these are explanations, and neither justify nor excuse. The truth is that it is hard to understand this episode, and harder still to accept it, unless of course we are prepared to show a little kindness toward a stricken man.

Yet not a hopelessly stricken man, for on one side of him Lawrence continued to behave like a tough and bouncy Irishman. Precisely during this period of failure, heart-sickness and notoriety Lawrence kept working away with an insatiable ambition, often

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for whole days and nights, at *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom.* Largely written in 1919, the manuscript was lost, completely and painfully redone, and in 1922 set up in proof at the Oxford *Times.* How ambitious he was Lawrence revealed in a letter to Edward Garnett:

> Do you remember my telling you once that I collected a shelf of 'Titanic' books (those distinguished by greatness of spirit, 'sublimity,' as Longinus would call it): and that they were *The Karamazovs, Zarathustra* and *Moby Dick.* Well, my ambition was to make an English fourth. You will observe that modesty comes out more in the performance than the aim.

"An English fourth" Lawrence did not quite make. Still, the book is one of the few original works of English prose in our century, and if Lawrence's name lives past the next half century it may well be for the book rather than the experience behind it. The book is subtitled "a triumph," and in regard to the Arabian campaign, formally its central action, this must surely be read as an irony. In another sense, however, it *is* a triumph: a vindication of consciousness through form.

As autobiography *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* is veiled, ambiguous, misleading: less a direct revelation than a performance from which the truth can be wrenched. Nor can it be taken as formal history, since it focusses too subjectively, too obsessively, perhaps too passionately on its theme: which is the felt burden of history rather than history itself. Yet the book *as an act* has become part of the history of our politics, and is as necessary for comprehending the twentieth century as Brecht's poems or Kafka's novels or Pirandello's plays.

Primarily the book is a work of art, the model for a genre that would become all too characteristic of the age: a personal narrative through which a terrible experience is relived, burned out, perhaps transcended. This genre, to be perfected by the victims of totalitarianism, is a perilous one, succumbing too easily to verbal mannerism and tending to wash away the distinction between history and fable.

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom is a work of purgation and disgorgement. It is also, in order to resist the pressures of memory, a work of the most artful self-consciousness in which Lawrence is constantly "arranging words, so that the one I care for most

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is either repeated, or syllable-echoed, or put in a startling position." Robert Graves has said that "the nervous strain of its ideal of faultlessness is oppressive," and Lawrence himself found that the book is "written too hard. There are no flat places where a man can stand still for a moment. All ups and downs, engine full on or brakes hard on." The feverish state in which Lawrence composed the book, especially the early drafts—

> I tie myself into knots trying to reenact everything, as I write it out. It's like writing in front of a looking-glass, and never looking at the paper, but always at the imaginary scene.

—may help to explain why the book is "written too hard."

Its power depends upon a doubleness of perspective. On the one hand, it can be read as a narrative of high excitements and descriptive flourish. The scene is rendered with fierce, exotic particularity, as if to force the reader into a sensuous participation in Lawrence's experience. Details are thrust out with brutal, even shocking intent; for in this kind of narrative the reader must not be allowed to settle into any comfort of expectation. The bleakness of the desert, the sudden killing of an Arab soldier, the horror of an assault upon helpless Turkish prisoners, the nomadic grandeur of a man like Auda, the nightmare detachment of the Deraa incident and then, at increasingly frequent intervals, the turnings toward aloneness, the merciless guerilla raids Lawrence conducted against his self—these and a thousand other bits comprise the agitated surface of the book.

Yet at every crucial point the writing, through wrenchings of metaphor and perspective, pulls attention away from the surface. It turns toward something else, at first a mere scattering of sentiments and then the growing and molding "I" of the book: an "I" that is not at all the conventional first-person narrator but an approximation of a figure who comes into being, like Melville's Ishmael, through the writer's struggle to write his book. It is the emergence of this self which keeps *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* from being a mere recital of excitements and horrors.

Because he tries to maintain an almost intolerable pitch of intensity, Lawrence seems repeatedly to fall into a state of depletion, and the book to crumble into a series of set-pieces, sections detailing a more or less complete incident. By the nature of the set-piece, each of these sections is detachable: they can be

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read as self-contained accounts of human exhaustion. And being detachable, they are so packed with nervous bravado and ambitious phrasing as to call attention to their life *as a form,* a series of compositional feats matching the feats of Lawrence's adventure. Yet through this accumulation of set-pieces there recurs the struggle of a self in formation; and therein the book gains a kind of unity.

To an age that usually takes its prose plain, Lawrence's style is likely to seem mannered. Unquestionably there are passages that fail through a surplus of effort; passages that betray the hot breath of hysteria; passages that contain more sensibility than Lawrence could handle or justify. But it is dangerous to dismiss such writing simply because we have been trained to suspect the grand. Lawrence was deliberately trying to achieve large-scale effects, a rhetoric of action and passion that may almost be called baroque; the style pursuing the thought. And while the reader has every reason to discriminate among these effects, it would be dull to condemn Lawrence merely for their presence.

Lawrence strives for a style of thrust and shock, and then, by way of balance, for passages of refined sensibility. He often uses words with a deliberate obliqueness or off-meaning, so as to charge them with strangeness and potential life. The common meaning of these key words is neither fully respected nor wholly violated; but twisted, sometimes into freshness and sometimes into mere oddity. All of this followed from conscious planning: "I find that my fifth writing . . . of a sentence makes it more shapely, pithier, stranger than it was. Without that twist of strangeness no one would feel an individuality, a differentness, behind the phrase."

It is a coercive prose, as it is a coercive book, meant to shake the reader into a recognition of what is possible on this earth. No one can end this book with emotions of repose; there is no pretense at conciliatory sublimation. The result, throughout, is a tensing of nerves and sensibility, a series of broken reflections upon human incompleteness. It is a modern book.

For Lawrence there was now to be one more significant entry into public life. Within a few months after the signing of the Versailles treaty, it became clear that he had been entirely right about the mid-East, and the massed heads of the French and

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British governments entirely wrong. By 1920 the British were pouring millions of pounds into Iraq in order to suppress Arab insurgents; the French were bombarding Damascus and spreading hatred with each discharge of their cannon. Soon the British decided they would have to modify their policy, which had been neither effective nor economical, and when Winston Churchill took over the Colonial Office in 1921 he offered Lawrence a post as advisor on mid-East affairs.

Lawrence now joined in political conferences in Cairo and for a brief time returned to the desert, where he helped work out a *modus vivendi* between the British and Arabs. A greater measure of autonomy was granted the Arabs in Iraq; the British army but not the RAF withdrawn; Feisal allowed to assume the throne; and peace momentarily restored. Lawrence said that justice had finally been done but the Arabs, wishing complete independence, took a less sanguine view.

His labor in composing *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and then the interval of service under Churchill had distracted Lawrence from himself. Now that both were done and nothing appeared to absorb or consume him, there could be no evading the one central fact of his post-war years: *that, in his freedom, he no longer knew how or why to live.* It was the problem of many sensitive men of his generation, and Lawrence, who more than most had earned the right to speak of it, could find no solution, no way out.

He was physically wearied, morally depleted, a man without the strength of true conviction. He had run through life too fast, and now had to face the cruel question of how to continue living though his life was done. The ordinary ways of middle-class England he could not settle into; the literary world, which he admired to excess, made him wildly uncomfortable; and politics seemed dirty, mean, a mug's game. Religion as dogma or institution left him as cold as in the past, yet there burned in him a desire for some enlarging selfless purpose he could neither find nor name. Lord Halifax was surely right when he said that "some deep religious impulse moved him . . . some craving for the perfect synthesis of thought and action which alone could satisfy his test of ultimate truth and his conception of life's purpose." If this craving be a delusion, it is one from which the world is fast recovering.

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Perhaps Lawrence's trouble was simply that of a man who, at the end of a great adventure, returns home and finds it impossible to slide into quiet and routine. (Some years later he would choose to translate the *Odyssey,* a book about a hero whose return home is endlessly delayed.) Whatever the reason, his life was painfully distraught. He would walk the streets of London for nights on end, lost in moodiness and self-examination. He ate poorly, carelessly. His home in Oxford, palled by the death of two brothers in the war, was unbearable. A mist of affection separated him from his mother. After his return from Paris, she has remembered, he would sit motionless as stone for entire mornings. In London he found new friends, many of them famous men, to whom he could occasionally burst out in oblique confession; but goodwill and understanding were not enough. "The worst thing about the war generation of introspects," he wrote several years later to the novelist Henry Williamson, "is that they can't keep off their blooming selves." Caught up as he was with his "blooming self," Lawrence would lapse into bouts of self-pity and puerile shows of vanity. It is easy enough to dislike and judge the Lawrence of these days. But there were times when he expressed with rare clarity and poignance the sense of drift which he shared with so many of his contemporaries.

"What more?" he wrote to Eric Kennington in 1922. "Nothing. I'm bored stiff: and very tired, and a little ill, and sorry to see how mean some people I wanted to respect have grown." A year later, after he had joined the RAF, he wrote to Lionel Curtis: "It's terrible to hold myself voluntarily here: and yet I want to stay here till it no longer hurts me. . . . Do you think there have been many lay monks of my persuasion? One used to think that such frames of mind would have perished with the age of religion: and yet here they rise up, purely secular."

Somewhat later Lawrence wrote in a letter to Robert Graves: "You see, I know how false the praise is: how little the reality compared with the legend: how much luck: how little merit. Praise makes a man sick, if it is ignorant praise." And when Graves remarked that there were two selves in Lawrence, a Bedouin self "longing for the bareness, simplicity, harshness of the desert—that state of mind of which the desert is a symbol—and the over-civilized European self," Lawrence answered: "The

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two selves, you see, are mutually destructive. So I fall between them into the nihilism which cannot find, in being, even a false god in which to believe." Later still, in a note to an unknown correspondent, probably in 1929, Lawrence wrote:

> I have done with politics, I have done with the Orient, and I have done with intellectuality. O, Lord, I am so tired! I want so much to lie down and sleep and die. Die is best because there is no reveille. I want to forget my sins and the world's weariness.

And in the early thirties Lawrence told a friend that he felt himself to be "an extinct volcano, a closed oyster, and I must discourage treasure-hunters from the use of tin-openers. . . . I am so tired . . ."

Taken from over a decade of Lawrence's life and grouped together in isolation, such passages unavoidably form a somewhat melodramatic picture. They omit the plateaus of ordinariness which fill the bulk of any life. They omit the moments of commonplace satisfaction. But that they are faithful to what Lawrence felt most deeply, that they show the most important side of the post-war Lawrence, seems beyond doubt. Through these years Lawrence suffered from a loss of *elan,* a sense of the void, the terror of purposelessness. He suffered from a nihilism which revealed itself as a draining of those tacit impulsions, those root desires and values which make men continue to live.

This condition was by no means unique to Lawrence. When Hemingway wrote his stories, with their variations on the theme of *nada;* when Pirandello drove skepticism to intolerable extremes in his plays; when so somber a figure as Max Weber could speak of the "disenchantment of the world" and the likelihood that "not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness"—they too were confronting the sense of the void, the sense that human life had entered a phase of prolonged crisis in which all of its sustaining norms had lost their authority. Lawrence reached these feelings in a unique way, through the desert of Arabia rather than the trenches of France. But once this strain of the exotic is put aside, there remains a common lot, a shared dilemma.

I would suggest that it is this Lawrence—the hero who turns into a bewildered man suffering the aftermath of heroism—who now seems closest to us. Had Lawrence simply returned to the

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wholesome life of an English gentleman, neither writing *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* nor the remarkable letters to Lionel Curtis, he would still have been noteworthy. Such a man, however, could hardly have captured the imagination of reflective people as the actual Lawrence did. His war-time record was remarkable, the basis for all that was to come; without it he might have been just another young man afflicted with post-war malaise. But what finally draws one to Lawrence, making him seem not merely an exceptional figure but a representative man of our century, is his courage and vulnerability in bearing the burden of consciousness. "One used to think that such frames of mind would have perished with the age of religion: and yet here they rise up, purely secular."

Tensions of the kind Lawrence suffered during the years after the war cannot be borne indefinitely. In August 1922, as if to wipe out all he had once been, Lawrence joined the Royal Air Force as an ordinary recruit under the name of John Hume Ross. Six months later, when his identity became known, he was forced to resign, but allowed to rejoin the regular army. There he remained until 1925, when his pleas and the intervention of powerful friends persuaded Air Marshall Trenchard to accept him again, this time under the name of T. E. Shaw. Until his death in 1935 Lawrence served the RAF as clerk and mechanic, in England and India.

For a man to whom power, fame and money were within reach, Lawrence's decision to bury himself in the ranks was an extraordinary one; for a man who had fought all his life against the force of his own ambition, it was a climax of self-mortification, an act of symbolic suicide. No single explanation can account for thirteen years spent in a military whose spirit was at war with his passion for freedom, whose discipline chafed and humiliated him. All the explanations together are also unsatisfactory, except perhaps as they come to an absolute need to break from his old self, the heroic Lawrence and the helpless Lawrence both.

"Honestly," he wrote to Robert Graves,

> it was a necessary step, forced on me by an inclination toward ground-level: by a despairing hope that I'd find myself on common ground with men . . . by an itch to make myself ordinary in a mob of likes: also I'm broke . . . It's going to be a brain-sleep, and I'll come out of it less odd than I went in: or at least less odd in other men's eyes.

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And in a preface that he wrote for the catalogue to Eric Kennington's exhibit of Arab portraits, there is a brief but perhaps deeper statement of motive: "Sometimes we wish for chains as a variety."

There were other, slightly different explanations. "Partly, I came here to eat dirt till its taste is normal to me. . . ." Less candidly, he told some people he had joined the RAF to assure himself a regular income. To Lionel Curtis, who brought out his metaphysical side, he wrote:

> Free-will I've tried, and rejected: authority I've rejected (not obedience, for that is my present effort, to find equality only in subordination. It is domination whose taste I have been cloyed with): action I've rejected: and the intellectual life: and the receptive senses: and the battle of wits. . . .

What remained? Somehow he managed to live through the torments of basic training, for which he was ten years and one war too old. He learned to claw his way through the fog of obscenities which filled the barracks where he slept. He found odd sensations of pain and pleasure in breaking himself to obey men he knew to be utterly unworthy of his obedience. And sometimes there was a rough comradeship, a peace of sorts. Today we would call it an "adjustment."

Why did he do it? To stamp forever upon his conscience the need for refusing power; to find some partial version of the monasticism he craved; to make up for the guilts that remained from the war; to return to the commonest of common life; to punish himself and test again his capacity for accepting pain; to distinguish himself in suffering—truth lies in all these but in none alone. Nor will it do to sentimentalize. Lawrence was happy, or if not happy, then peaceful for long stretches of time. Whether he was stationed in England or Karachi did not seem to matter much: he was the same in one place as another. Still, it would be equally sentimental to avoid the fact that he had surrendered, accepted his dispossession:

> I was an Irish nobody. I did something. It was a failure. And I became an Irish nobody.

Throughout the years in service there were small pleasures, bits of compensation. Like a character in Conrad, he achieved a severe responsibility in his daily work, the "job-sense" that sees one through. ("One had but to watch him scrubbing a barrack-

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room table," recalled a corporal from the tank corps, "to realize that no table had been scrubbed just in that way before.") He found physical pleasure and a sense of freedom in racing his motorcycle across the narrow English roads. He made lasting friends in both the army and RAF, with whom he lived on terms of intermittent ease. He made friends, as well, with some of the greatest writers of the day: Bernard Shaw, E. M. Forster, Thomas Hardy. He tried his hand at critical essays, which are neither quite first-rate nor merely commonplace: a fine one on Landor, a respectable one on H. G. Wells. He turned the *Odyssey* into firm, often pungent English prose—some classicists have balked, but it is a living book. He finished *The Mint,* a severely chiselled picture of barrack life: Joycean in style, sometimes brilliant in evocation, structured as a series of set-pieces, showing a decided advance in control over *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* but too markedly an exercise, a self-conscious effort to *write.* And he conducted a wide, often pleasing correspondence with an army of friends.

His letters, though hardly a substitute for the definitive biography which some Englishman has still to write, give a more faithful picture of the shifts and turns in Lawrence's life than do either his own books or the books written about him. They are not letters written systematically out of one impulse or idea, a rigid notion of what a letter should be. Some, like the early ones, are interesting because they show us a typically intelligent English youth of a time we find increasingly hard to remember or imagine. Some, like the few from the war years, are valuable simply as a glass, transparencies upon action. Some, like those to Lionel Curtis, form a grave impersonal confession, not an unburdening of secrets, but the statement of a man in agony and quest. Others hold one by a sudden power in expression, sudden break-throughs to candor of speech. Whether they are "great letters," in the sense Keats's surely are, need not trouble us for a moment. They are the letters of a man who deserves to live in the imagination of his time.

In May 1935, to avoid two errand boys coming toward him on a road, Lawrence crashed his motorcycle, and died a few days later, never having recovered consciousness. Like much of his life, his death was no completion; it failed to round off his drama or his problem. He left his name entangled with a cluster of unanswered questions, this prince of our disorder.

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H. W. BLATTNER

Sound of a Drunken Drummer

Doing fifty up Mission she said to Rob, sober and upright beside her, "Don't worry, boy, no cop's going to catch us if I have to do ninety. They'd have to shoot me in the tires," but there weren't any around, probably all in their station houses counting poker chips, and when he gave her a glance she said, "That's right, I don't like cops. Instinctively I don't like them, verstehst Du?"

He seemed to. He always did. It was one of the beautiful things about him. He had so many: sweet disposition, handsome intelligent presence, a strong uninhibited capacity for love. Plus good manners. A sterling type.

"Oh love me love me love me true," she sang low with the radio, "cause there's no one in the world but yew-hoo-hoo," and gave out there arbitrarily recollecting the woman back in the drugstore where she'd gone to get the prescription filled that she'd put the arm on the nice young doctor for: the naive swimming look that surprisingly often got to them, the young sweet—helpless—not too much, careful there, that's right, got it now just the right pitch—"You see doctor I'm a stranger here, I'll be going back East soon but I'm under rather a severe strain—" Here something quick about the death of a beloved relative—"And I can't sleep so if you could let me have something a bit strong perhaps so I'll be sure to get some rest, I do need it badly."

Hadn't failed her yet any of these young ones that at times jockeyed for the moment with expectation, unlike most of the older trouts rendered wily and callous by suffering, other people's of course—for whom it was all déjà vu like the movie operator who dozes on the job. You could practically read the diagnosis forming up behind the scientific foreheads: "Neurotic. Drinks—" But she was always dead sober at these times and anyway she didn't drink so much most of the time that it was anything like a matter of leaping to the eye, when you considered people like Toni and her clique who went in for it seriously in order not to be, as what's-his-name had said, or had he—I think not, therefore I am not—Men, types. Autumn leaves. Oh, sheets.

But where, what had she started to—no matter, possibly some

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little thing she was going to say to Rob here who understood one well enough anyway so it wasn't actually necessary to say anything, and slowing for the turn into Ocean Avenue she looked at him and coarsely taken with his companionable air of capable interest flung an arm about his shoulders and said cheek to cheek, "I like you, you know? Men are foul. Dogs are noble." He cut a wet swipe at her chin as she let him go raking away roughly tender, and his profile level with hers faced forward.

Tooling along in the ghost-grey night inside the snug tent of the convertible they wound their way to Junipero Serra and idled on through Portola to where the fine houses slept aristocratic, one couldn't picture people snoring inside. "Richard does, though," she said. "Quite obscenely. I don't know, it simply sounds that way. Look," she pointed, "there's where he is this instant, back in his bedroom there, snoring. Perhaps why Mrs. Wrighthill sleeps separate. *And* à cause de moi, it goes without saying. Marriage one long bore, did someone say. Of *course* she knows, silly. You don't imagine this is the first time, do you? But being a lady she naturally resents not being first fiddle. I suppose she kept her eyes on all that gold paving her way up the aisle, and who am I to scorn her for a natural feminine instinct. No, let's be broad about the thing. He must have been young once, oilily tender. Oi Lily—bei mir bist Du a sister under your skin. No, in truth a formidable woman. A lady. Aren't many of them left, it's said. Stepping all in white with hymen intact and cool authority lo these many years to where attended the gentleman who these days pays for our keep, your horsemeat and my scotch and minks. Not that I asked for any of that barbarity of dead skins but he insisted, Richard's that generous. I'm sure he'd offer to put me through college if I didn't already have my sheepskin. Which I got through the skin of my ass being nice to Professor O'Rourke—you're quite right, it *does* sound like a fart in a bathtub. Old but still serviceable, like an international playboy. The genius of the people comes out in these things. Like dirty jokes. And him poor devil, the professor I mean, scared stiff he'd be found out. Those intellectuals, they don't overdo that sort of thing although who knows, with the student body constantly changing. If those ivied walls had tongues, mercy. Richard's house too, such a coincidence. Boy, am I in the Ivy League. However that Elise Lynch, she always did turn a hand

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or an ass to anything. Way back I was told I'd come to a bad end, and that I have testifies to my powers of application because if you think it's anything but a rocky road to hell you're off the beam, boy." She reached over and rubbed the back of his ear. "Did you know, in a happy home even the animals are happy—the dogs, cats, lions, snakes. When I was a kid we had dogs by the half dozen and not one but was a snarler and biter. Pavlov would have been enchanted—you never saw such conditioning. Still it wasn't that so much made me take to other people's beds. I had my smattering of virtue. More of a built-in inclination, I should say. Got it from Daddy, no question. Who couldn't climb off one playmate than he was casting about for another. Kept poor Mother in a constant state of two-mindedness, like having two heads. And the kids getting the psychic fallout, naturally." She rubbed his ear again. He liked it, leaning to get the full satisfaction. "Well, all I can say is I bet you'd be every bit as generous as Richard if you were a man, which thank heaven you're not. This way it's a much more satisfactory relationship. Men and women can't help being dishonest with each other, it's one of the unwritten laws. Listen, if they ever went crazy and told each other the truth there'd be a massacre in the streets."

They were wandering around easy like that, just riding around as they did most nights—Richard left around nine or half-past, not alone because of Mrs. Wrighthill. A man of fifty-three had his sedate routines—she going on talking to him who was such a good listener, as she had got into the habit of doing because if you stayed too long in saloons you got stinking and it was more comfortable as well as seemly to do it inside your own subsidized walls or next door with Toni and her crowd who all they had was money and carrying their cargo of hooch or H according to preference had jettisoned their souls long ago, when of all things there was a pair of dogs exuberantly copulating on the sidewalk, the right time if the wrong place but how naturalistic compared to humans: in the darkened rooms, the wall-eyed fumbling. Rob spied them too and whimpered, looking back through the rear window. "Don't take it so to heart," she said, "or wherever. You've had yours, if you'll remember the charming bit you ran across in Sutro Heights last week. In broad daylight too." One walked on pretending not to notice and after a suitable interval turned and whistled, on his

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return slipping the leash on with a mild scold to make it appear as if he'd done no worse than lift a leg on the nasturtiums. So proud and set-up he looked, similar to Richard when he'd put over one of his big deals.

"We'll celebrate," he would say, beaming some—he had the smooth round pink-tinted kind of face to which it came natural, at such times he definitely did have the bland chic, a combination of smoothness and éclat, of a minister in charge of a large and wealthy congregation. By the same token there was his voice to play around one in clerical compass, warm, resonant yet urbane, undoubtedly the instrument that had increased him his fortune, for he came of one of those elite Western clans whose heads started out grubbily as prospectors and wound up sleeping on gold-knobbed beds. When they didn't sail off to chivvy simpleminded natives on tropic isles, trading beads and Mother Hubbards for the real estate. Or on that order—how could she be expected properly to know, an effete New Yorker ignorant of their large Western ways.

"All right," she would say. "Let's." So then he'd have a champagne supper sent in, and top off the whole with some love play. Not too much. Richard had his age and health in addition to his dignity to think of.

But she saw she had come around to his house again, and on a whim stopped the car in front of the tall red-brick white-trim house back of the fine meandering date-palmed street and observing it imagined how he'd disapprove, silently of course, if he knew she was sitting there at her midnight loafing. For being a wellbred man, in the—what, eight, ten months they'd been in association—so hard to say, they came and they went and when they came you wished they'd went—in all this time he had never once said a word about her drinking which naturally he abominated, except to refer in a round-about manner to the evils of liquor. Himself, a wine man and maybe one two martinis a month. Tout à fait comme il faut. A man of breeding and substance. Gentleman, gentleman friend: mousing around sedate, broad-bottomed, always the cheese and never a nip of the trap.

A patrol car pulled in to the curb. The door slammed and a cop walked back toward her on flat, let's see what we've got here feet.

"Having any trouble, miss?" He peered in as into a cave.

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"Since you mention it officer yes, some," she said. "Nothing you could fix, though, thanks all the same."

He measured her out of his ruddy bull-terrier face and said with something of a hard, accustomed sigh, "Well now, let's have a look at your license."

"Sure, if you must."

He held a flashlight on it, peering, and handed it back. "Like to know what you're parked here for, if you don't mind."

"Well, taking one thing with another I should say I do but that's neither here nor there, is it."

"It sure isn't," he said heavily, leaning the elbow of a thigh-sized arm in on her. Rob growled but she casually laid a hand on him and he didn't follow up.

She relaxed, hands idle on the wheel and congratulated herself on having drunk vodka and then not enough to cause a hassle. "It's this way, officer," she said. "I like to ride around dreaming nights. Kind of a therapy, you see, when you can't sleep. Therapy, that means—"

"I know what it means," he said, his dewlaps contracting a bit.

"Well, good. They're doing an excellent job of training, aren't they. So I drove in here and stopped because it's so peaceful I can hear my motor purr."

"Sounds all right to me," he said.

"Oh, it's a superb motor," she said. "None better."

They gazed at each other, eyes glistening in the witching light of the dashboard.

"All right now," he said. "That'll be all. Better run along before I change my mind, however."

"Yes *sir,* officer. That's just what I'll do. But may I say it's good to see the law right in there, protecting property and what's the other—yes, life." She turned on her nicest debutante smile. "A rivederci," she said, backed up and swept off around him.

Well, it had got to him of course. Her smile really could have been her fortune, if she'd bothered to lift her little finger instead of her skirt, so much too soon and too often. But then she got to thinking of Wimberley, for no ready reason except the usual: dead now poor devil, done in despite the specialists, all the crazy care. Hadn't belonged to him long, and him on his last lung then, being eaten by the cancer. A bachelor, it had been all right for

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her to live in and he gave it out that she was his secretary—clever, that. All the same rather a decent solid type, Wim. A shame, wrenched off at thirty-nine and from out of all that wealth, too. One time money didn't talk loud enough. And so thoughtful of him, seeing to it virtually in extremis that she found a fresh bed-down. Befitting a man who inheriting his fortune was above the vulgarity of treating money lightly, and so left every last penny to a foundation bearing his name.

"I'll never forget the day," she said to Rob. He yawned and slid down, paws drooping over the seat edge and snuggling his chin down on them. " 'I've been thinking of your future,' he says in that awful weak staggered voice, and the shadow of death on the wall, 'and I think I've got the answer—' "

A slant of sun lay on the bed, that if it had fallen on him would have shown him up transparent, rendered down to nothing as he was. Out the window to one side the Golden Gate bridge draped its harp hang in the clear silver air—a wind drove with fury across the sky, blanching it—Tamalpais rising farther on its remote majestic drag, dark-blue and the contours fuzzed in silver. Straight ahead and below the ruins of the Palace of Fine Arts foamed up out of the hags'-hair trees, the Yacht Harbor spread out a rich show of boats and over across the blue-iron white-starched water squatted the serene hump of Belvedere like some huge furry animal taking a foot bath. Another eye-jump and there was Alcatraz, a pedantic impregnable reminder, while a further shift brought in the Contra Costa hills beginning to be smogged in, faintly sulphurous, safely far off. Altogether a glorious view, fit to die in sight of.

The man engaged in it—hardly, gamely fighting every inch of the way—courage for the sheer sake of it, a noble thing—laid his egg-size haunted eyes on her and said, "Never got to—know each other right—did we," the words pulled out of him like nails.

"No," she said.

"But no time—go into that." Then it was he said that about her future. "Richard Wrighthill—you know him—"

"I should," she said. "He's been around often enough." And as it didn't sound quite right, "Seems to think a lot of you, Wim."

"Always been—good friend. Wants to—wants you to—come to him."

She thought it over, her dark-blue eyes made lighter, more in-

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tense by the breezed light so that the effect was of a cool burning, and held in a fixed observance suggesting some jewel-hard inner amusement totally disconnected from the world contemplated. His stare on them was like that of a man walking to the scaffold taking his last fill of the sky.

"Married, isn't he?" she said.

"Not—very. Never—got along. Take good care of you. Told me he's—very much—in love."

"Well, at least sounds as if I wouldn't want for a good home," she said. "And I do appreciate your thinking of me, Wim. Up to now though I've always landed on my feet."

He shook his head, it rolled slowly back and forth on the pillow like a marble in the hand. As if mustering his strength he stared at her with a gaunt longing, a far light deep in his eyes like the twist at the core of a whirlpool—or maybe it was merely his condition accounted for that spectered air. Then he began to talk, weak, halting from the effort of delicacy as well, reminding her of the time she had taken an overdose of sleeping pills, he didn't want to feel she'd ever do anything so terrible and cruel again, and if she had someone like Richard, a steady kind man to take care of her, he felt sure she never would.

He paused, for breath. And said then suddenly, "I'm—dying," without any theatrics, but it cost him a slight gasp. "Elise, you're so—lovely, young—for God's sake live, if you knew—if you knew what it's like—"

As though some merciless outside force were attacking his face it twisted, wrung by a rising agonized ecstasy that dissolving in sudden improbability reshaped with a kind of gradual successive integration and sank like a spear profound, strengthless into the evacuating eyes.

She was on her feet to run for the nurse but weakly, like a tendril his hand caught hers and she saw he wasn't being worked over any more, just infinitely exhausted, and when feebly imperious he shook his head she said at once, "Okay, I won't. Isn't there anything I can—here, let me fix your pillow," and driven to action, with a subtly frowning face smoothed and settled the pillow, fussed around with the covers, all the while trying to keep her face out of his sight because he hated pity. Even her own crude kind, that could extend only a short lawless way.

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He lay with his eyes shut and the look of a ghost on him for a considerable time, while sitting on the edge of the bed she held his hand feeling that that at least fit into the picture. And when at length his eyes came open with an ancient, blurred look she said, "All right, Wim, I'll go with this, what's his name, Wrighthill. So don't worry about it. Goodness, I'm not worth it. You lie there and rest, concentrate on that."

A little knife of a smile twisted in on the pale sensitized lips, the smile of a wounded knight. It faded and he said, "You—promise—promise you'll never try—"

"Wim, it was just an accident. Or supposing it wasn't, all I must have been after was some attention. If we have to get Freudish about it. Do you think if I'd really wanted to—no, it's too silly to waste any more talk on."

A feeble frown drew his brows together Christlike. After a little he said, a whisper, "Whole life—before you." Took a minute for breath, and: "Go to Richard—right away. I'll tell him. No good for you—here. Life—you want life."

So what could she do but agree, especially as the door opened and the nurse glanced in anxious at this long visiting.

A buxom elderly type, she said out in the hall with a brisk matron authority, "You shouldn't, dear. It's hard on people that aren't accustomed to it, and you can't do any good anyway."

Elise shrugged her shoulders. "He asked for me. Still stands, does it? No dice?"

The woman shook her head. "Honestly, dear, you shouldn't go in there any more. You come out looking shaky and after all there's nothing you or anyone can do. It's only a matter of time now."

"Looks like I won't be around much longer, anyhow."

"Good, I'm glad. You're too young—"

"Nuts. At twenty-seven who should be so young."

"You're kidding," the woman said, her face ungainly with amazement. "I would have sworn twenty-one, at the most twenty-two."

"It's true, to look at me you wouldn't take me for a lush, would you? It's my peachy complexion. Holding up real good, nothing seems to touch it. So if I look shaky it's more from hangover than poor Wim. By the way, got anything on you? I'm out of Veronal again."

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The nurse starched up at once. "No I haven't," she said with a quick severity. "Excuse me." Brushing past she went in to her patient, and Elise ambled on down to her quarters.

That night the Chinese houseboy came to say there was a gentleman to see her, so she went down and there was Wrighthill in the study, nervous as a tomcat on the scent.

He stammered a greeting, they sat down opposite each other and after a short somewhat soggy silence he pitched in, his gaze filmed-over, heroic, the grim dedication of him conferring the seal of acceptance.

"Miss Lynch—or may I call you Elise, I—I guess I'll come right to the point." He cleared his throat, to eliminate the gravel which whether due to guilt or the nervousness of desire or both choked out the resonance: one got vaguely the impression of a man unjustly suffering an indignity, and in the rear of his mind an eventual revenge forming.

"Wim tells me he's spoken to you about a—a certain, hrrum, matter," he said, switching around to something like an intransigent distraction.

"Right. You want to shack up with me, that it?"

His eyelids quivered, rose up to to expose his stare—cooling, cooler, stopping just short of cold. But at any rate he was jolted out of most of the jitters. "Isn't that rather an unnecessary way of putting it—"

"I prefer straightforward. Look, we don't have to play footsie, being as we're both with it. Make your pitch, I'll listen and if the terms are right it's a deal."

She slid down a little, relaxed in her chair and lit a cigarette. Silence, a groping. She smoked her cigarette, relaxed, looking as if she didn't have a thing on her mind. Which being exactly the way it was, after a couple more minutes she glanced over at him and grinned. He must have read something of his own into it, because all at once getting up with a sort of twitched nonchalance, and a short rather sad-sounding laugh he came and lowered himself into a chair beside her, taking her hand in his warm pin-cushion one.

And said richly warm, quite returned to his own harmony, "You're acting this way because you're scared, poor darling. But dearest, you must believe me, there's nothing to be afraid of. I—

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the fact is I care for you a great deal, a very great deal. I have from the first time I saw you. You were standing at the top of the stairs, and I had never seen a more beautiful girl. Your lovely golden hair, there was a halo—yes, angelic is the word." He paused a moment. "I'm not the kind of man who loses his head easily, but at that instant something happened to me, something I had never expected to feel again. And each time we spoke a few words you—you attracted me more and more. But I don't have to go on, you can see well enough what you've done to me," he said tying it up with a hint of jovial brusqueness—leaving the door open for a dignified exit, just in case.

She was looking at him with an unswerving bright interest not quite amusement but near it, as if for the moment she found him novel in his brash advocate's substance.

Rousing she said, "I suppose Wim's filled you in on the background."

He nodded. "Born in New York City. Married at sixteen, the marriage annulled. College."

"Right, broadly speaking. But you'll want the gaps filled. Where did you leave off—college, yes. Well, it was there I started to go to the bad, really I mean, not just playing around at it like before I got married. And the less said about that the better. Not because there's any pain in it but because it was plain adolescent and birdbrained. But to go on, about the only thing stuck with me from college was a few tricks of copulation. Oh, and I mustn't omit the interval in Switzerland. Shipped me off in a last desperate attempt at regeneration. Came back reeking of the continental polish: rectitude, and when it won't work discretion. So it's good stock you're getting, if the family did kick me out owing to a little scandal involving gin and gigolo. Never touch the stuff now. The gin that is. In any case I don't come at any bargain rates, it's only fair to tell you."

"I'm prepared to go, um, as high as necessary." And he looked, perhaps because the commercialism distressed him, a shade unnerved. Then she thought it might be That Word that had titillated him, warmed his guilt and thus made him doubly determined to get her: since he was suffering already, why not go whole hog. And later simply through the osmosis of association she found out that was about how it shaped up, his puritanism

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uneasing him despite the out of his wife's spurning though you could say this for him, it never caused him enough discomfort to rumble any foundations.

"Just thought I'd get the lay of the land," she said. "Because it's always best to get clear on the essentials, then everybody knows where he stands. It worked out pretty good with my former comrades."

His eyes that had begun assiduously to stroke her like a collector with a new choice item backed off infiltrated by alarm, suspicion and a gaining uncertainty.

"Sorry," she said. "Forgot that's a verboten word. Now if I had said comrades in arms, but the obviousness of it. Because lovers is pretentious and old-novelish, like soul. That leaves what, intimates, which rings coy, and lays, too defensive. Well, do we come down to the deal or go on with the preambles."

But he remained mute regarding her with a hung love-sickness, caught with his lust down, and for a moment she had almost a compunction. But what, not such a cinch for her either being at constant beck and call and never calling your body your own except when you sneaked some guy pour le sport, which wasn't cricket. But then who after all was perfect and what was so special about her she should do the noble.

So she allowed him some more time but when he just lumped there with that rather dreamy melancholy as though trying to summon up some approvable manner or expression out of her, and his hand now and again contracting hers in slight nervous spasms she suddenly got bored and vulgarly crossing her arms over her chest said breezy, hoydenish, "Well open the safe door, Richard, and let's see the shine of your gelt."

However it happened to amuse him, after a hesitant low-keyed manner. "You write your own ticket, little girl," he said, his smile moving by fits. "I guess I could say I'll live to regret those words, but I don't think I will." And with an assurance as smooth, confident and full-bodied as it was peremptory, "I'm a pretty fair judge of character. And I believe in you, in your basic sweetness, the good stuff you're made of."

Watching his principles pop out all over him she grinned. "All I can say to that is we'll hope for the best. As for me, I'm totally inconnu to myself. French. Had to show off some."

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"Your accent is perfect," he said. "I never can get that 'u.' "

"Easy. Purse the lips. U. U. No extra charge for coaching. Little, you said? Five seven and lithe as a panther. And there's two of everything—eyes, arms, breasts, legs. One mouth, one—you'll find everything in satisfactory working order."

He took her hand back in his, which was moist, and twitched it.

"I'm sure it is," he said, his pink richening. Then in a minute with the care of a superficially restored composure, "There's an apartment four blocks from here. Everything's furnished, all you have to bring is your suitcase."

"Plural. There's three. Plus a trunk. Wim's not stingy. I was on my uppers when he took me in and now look at the wardrobe."

"Nothing to what *I'll* give you, darling," he said, and began stroking her arm.

"Keep talking." Just testing, for the hell of it.

"A car will be waiting for you the day you move in."

"Make it a Cad convertible. No mistress should be without one."

He had the good manners to let it flow on past. "When can you make it, tomorrow?"

"No reason why not. I know Wim wants me out the sooner the better."

He darkened somewhat, right off. "It's such a horrible thing," he said."At his age, with all he's got to live for."

A pause, his lover's clasp settling with a sort of restraint. "It just came to me," she said. "Some say this here, now is Hell. What if it's Heaven, after all?"

The darkening became a frown, then cleared. "You mustn't trouble your lovely head with such things," he said. His hand put loving pressure on hers. "I'll see you then around five at the Rochester Arms. It's at the corner of—"

"I know where it is."

"The eighth floor. Gorgeous view. I happened to hear of a vacancy, a friend of mine moved out so I went right around and took it. I was sure you'd like it."

"I can see you're a man not given to doubts." Her smile was charming, slanted, with a tangle of lashes and her eyes glinting like water through ferns. A certain perverse quirk at the corners

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of the lips went ignored—he stared with a sudden jowled barrenness before with a uniform snap-to coming out of it he said, "I had talked to Wim and both of us felt, that is we thought since you'd be at loose ends—"

"Now there, that's what I call an apt turn of phrase. Not everyone could have come out with it so neatly. I must say, I *am* a lucky type. It's not every girl can transfer from bed to bed without having to go out and hustle. I'm *so* grateful, Mr. Wrighthill."

"You called me Richard a while back," he said.

"So I did. I like Richard. I won't call you Dick or Rich."

"Nobody ever has."

"Not even your wife?"

"No." A silence came down, and the fallen-curtain sense didn't lift when he said, "Elise, dear, there's one condition—my wife is never to be mentioned between us."

"Of course. Sorry."

He brought his bulk a little closer and she drew away a fraction before noticing it wasn't a threatening but an amorous move. "You're so lovely," he said in a pressured voice and she could hear his breath coming through the hairs in his nose—a rather large one, the kind described as commanding on the face of a successful man and bazoo on a Skid Row character.

"So lovely," he said, breathing, and his arm going around her he drew her to her feet.

Now this is where I clinch it, she said in herself as with a bull dignity his head loomed. Then the large solid pressure of his body was against hers with the large meaty arms wrapping and the warm-breathed mouth coming down quivering, a rabid diffidence.

When in time their bodies parted it wasn't unlike a stopper leaving a bottle. Dark ox blood suffused his face and his eyes were stunned, dimly questing. They watered as the red sank down leaving a fevered pink and his breath strongly sweeping from his nostrils.

"My darling," he said, "my dearest," with the repressed grunted pain of pleasure, a muted tone of agonized worry. His arms enclosed her with the manipulating lightness of a relentless grasp, and when his eyes lurched over to the couch she said, "Okay, but it'll have to be quick. The houseboy could come in."

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He smiled hazed, staggered-round in a dream. "That's how it mustn't ever be," he said, mumbled. "There's tomorrow, and all the other tomorrows—oh, I'll wait for my darling." He drew her up close, and into her mind came the time she had wrestled a mattress over. "We're going to be happy, so happy," his breath chuffed in her ear. "Aren't we. My sweetheart, my lovely girl."

"Sure," she said.

"Darling, sweetest," he nuzzled her ear. "I know you're going to make me the happiest man in the world, in all the world." And with a sort of trespassing helplessness his hand began making free of her breast.

"I don't anticipate any complaints," she said. "It's all those amateurs screw it up for us pros."

His hand came regretful away, he gazed at her gently chiding, with the hazed smile. "You mustn't be hard, dearest," he said. "Love is a beautiful thing; the love of a man and a woman . . . a beautiful thing."

She took his hand and put it back on her breast. "I'm not hard." she said. "Feel." And when his eyes started to glaze she said leaning back on the log of his arm with a roll of warm young passion, audacious and free, "I'm yours. Go ahead. Have some."

So then of course it happened, over on the couch. With him first jamming a chair under the doorknob, from a stealthed presence of mind. Although no one disturbed them he was impelled to hurry and fumble, but she accommodated herself and bringing all her resources into play caused him to cry out once, a sharp hoarse reaching that was the sincerest form of homage.

And afterwards, sitting on the edge of the couch following his set-faced, absorbed zippering and resettling and her casual straightening he gathered her in his arms and told her, in a tone mixing a shining wonder with the dash of gallantry that foresees a dazzling future, how wonderful she was, with a profusion of darlings, belovedests and sweetests which after a while she interrupted by saying she didn't like to bring it up at a time like this, but shouldn't she be going up to take some measures.

He rose immediately, a bulked fluster in the movement. "Yes, I—I wasn't thinking—but how could I have thought of anything but you, my most wonderful dearest—"

"My goodness, that was only a coming attraction," she said. "Save the rave notices for the main feature. Well, I've got to get

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cracking. Not that it's really too urgent, I've never got pregnant, can't probably, but why take chances."

He nodded flushing a bit and then quickly said he'd see her the next day. "I'll try to make it before five—Oh wait, wait, you wouldn't go without a kiss, sweetheart—"

She grinned before she could think not to, at his bugeyed entreaty like a schoolboy demanding a promised lollipop, a tuft of hair standing up in front, horn of a dilemma. "Sure," she said. "We'll lip it up a little." But too taken up with the terse acknowledgement of his need to care, or even listen he gathered her up.

Upon her leaving finally she looked back from the door: the manner of his standing there was remindful of a tree just before it starts to fall.

In the morning she said goodbye to Wim, who said it took a big load off his mind and wished her all the best. "I do want you—to be—happy, darling," he said, in his great eyes the involuntary longing and disassociation of the terminally ill. She bent to kiss him quick, with almost an intolerance, and got out of the room. In the hall she was obscurely astonished to find herself undergoing a sinking spell, or something of the kind, but it went away quietly.

Over at the Rochester Arms true to the man's word a Cad awaited, and in the evening there was a sumptuous meal with champagne, which she didn't much go for and afterwards his heavy middle-aged embrace, ditto, but it kept her in scotch and silks and Rob in his two pounds of horsemeat a day, so there was no cause to grumble.

"Be there soon, boy," she said to him, watching the minuscule bayonet tips of the fog fall before the headlights. He pricked up his ears but didn't lift his head, sleepy from his long walk on the beach that afternoon. "I should be too but I never felt more wide awake," she said. Only one o'clock, too. Suddenly all those hours to be lived through before daylight heaved up like the horizon from a pitching ship. Something, a slime like a psychic excretion was released, she sat up, stumbling after memory—hadn't Toni mentioned a party or was it the next night—what difference, always one long party recessed by a day or two. Peculiar how it all balled up so one day ran into the next, and harder and harder to remember things. Right in there, working away drilling all those holes and when the job was finished, that would be the day.

She hummed to "Some Enchanted Evening," coming through

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the radio. Cheesecloth. Wrap that Dutch one in, with the glowing red skin—Edam. Tiny greasy holes, can't tell one from another. From a hole in the ground. No, the other much more sanitary. How the hair sizzles in the fierce blue flame. Yes, dear, that's Auntie Elise doing a slow burn. Anne, safe and sound with husband and child. Junior League. Suckering the poor. Deeply ashamed of the kid sister and trying not to show it, poor dear. Go in peace, Annie girl. She shall never darken your heart again. Well, one in every barrel.

Motion, a shift, oblique—the woman in the drugstore on Mission, prototype of the embattled respectable poor: virulence like a fling of acid in the look. "Stands to reason," she said. "Us representing the beautiful and damned—nobody ever counts the ugly and damned. And them, the plain and saved, backs to the wall and showing a coyote tooth."

But he just gave a tiny yelp well into his sleep and they rode on carried in the womb of the car past the dark houses and apartments and their own less than two minutes away when in the crashed-monument way of it the entire unit started to give coming deadly alive to the swift scurry of the brittle iced brilliance lashing out the trail of iced fire and then fast, windrush the quaked gathering, stream-up for the giant bursting and up, up—straining to the higher—highest—

No. No.—The shuddered braking.

Under the dead hand the car swerved to the curb.

The break, as into a death. Long, strong temblor drag. Penultimate: erratic, capersome almost the spasms of decline, down-waft by sighed levels. And the arrival, touched bottom: organization of drummed calm, gears meshing in cottonwool.

As in a return to consciousness, new-grotesque the street emerged to perception, the gray gauze-bandage fog over a recognizable front of building.

And now the cold. Oh, the cold. Teeth chattering she shook so it woke up Rob who pulled himself up and in calm wakefulness sat by, a mute staff.

She said rattling, tattered, with a lamenting dribble of laughter, "Not this time, not yet," and shaking with the laughter dribbling grabbed hold putting her face to him and he braced strong, grave, planted firm by her side.

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Took a spell but then it was over, the worst of it. From time to time she would be hauled tacking on her side but the worst was done: twister receding to distance. Digging with a hand cold and rigid as a spade for cigarettes, "Boy, that one really whirled me," she said. Voice with a timbre like nickelodeon piano. The match kept hitting up beyond the cigarette tip but eventually she got it going, and smoked it down to the tar.

"All right, boy, end of the line." She got out and held the door for him in a prickled dizzy glitter that passed off in a couple of shakes, waited while he took a leak on a small snobbish maple planted in the concrete, then they went through a tall glass door backed by scrolled iron.

Jay the elevator boy said hello with his usual soft look disordering on a devious concern for her stormed whiteness with the bluish corpse tinge she had glimpsed in the lobby mirror: poor kid, kind of a job never went anywhere and his head turned by all the plush living, a wonder more of them didn't fetch up in Alcatraz. Giving him a dollar bill she said, "Put it to bed for me, will you, Jay?"

"Sure will, Miss Lynch. Thanks."

In the corridor she followed the low sounds of revelry to Toni's door and pushing it open the voices and music blew up warm, broken up. A burn of light, active mouths party-loud and suddenly Toni's elegant parrot screech: "Where *have* you been, baby. We've been brawling here for hours." She laid a predatory hand on her, her sleek mouth writhing with her talk under the harassed eyes, a party was a desperate thing to Toni because if they didn't have a good time they wouldn't come back and she'd drown in the silence. "And I want you to come and meet an Indian, honey—a real one, not one of our scrofulous kind. A superb fawn of a boy, you wouldn't believe the lashes. He's been at the blondes already but wait till he sees *you*."

Elise obligingly said she'd have at him and asked Rob to lie down. His forelegs slid out sticklike, he laid his chin on his paws and narrowly, with a well-mannered skepticism eyed a woman who leaned over to shriek baby talk at him.

"This way, sweetheart," Toni took her hand. Following the working machinery of the sleek parceled hips she felt her own slapped and said hi to one of the hard core, a specimen who for

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some time had been trying to get close, whose dank Hitler look and the mouth with the spittled corners made her feel objectively sick so when in a warning voice he called, "Elise, I want you," she kept going, deaf. Then her hand was caught and a face young still but with an old-boy rakishness looked down braced, a tipped desperateness barging in and out of the eyes. "Hello, what's this."

"Not now, Og," Toni pulled on Elise's other hand. "I'm taking her to meet Sri. Later, baby."

He reared, an ineffectual rage and said withering, "Just because he's dark-skinned. And I'll bet only one diaper to his name."

"*Shhh.* If he should hear think what it'll do to Asian-American relations."

He stared with a pointer desperateness at Elise. "Hell with 'em, I say. I've got my rights, a full-blooded American boy. Honey, I'm telling you, they itch under those diapers and when they die their wives go up in smoke. Gee, baby, you and me could have a ball. Ah, come *on*. . . ."

"Later I said," and Toni yanked her off.

To set her before a milk-chocolate young man with large ogling mahogany eyes in a beautiful face alive with a gay and sportive charm, the overall look of him, passionate and dashing, outlandish as an antelope among cattle.

"Sri Rhamapandra, darling—he's here to study our primitive migrant workers aren't you sweetheart," Toni said and in a streak was off in pursuit of a couple at the door, leaving. Her screech cut through: "My God you're not *going*."

Their eyes on a level Elise and the beautiful young man confronted each other. A sparkle and effervescence swiftly came over him, as if he was being shaken up and all his manhood rising to the surface.

"This is a pleasure, well, I must say," he said in a half-gabble with a British accent and a joyful shoulder play, his ravished eyes all over her like a frisking. "My word, yes. *Indeed*."

"How's the name again," Elise said.

"Sri Rhamapandra."

"I had a panda once. Lost it in a blizzard outside a saloon in Nebraska."

"Pandra," he said. "And yours, please? It is all so noisy."

She told him.

"Charming, charming. You are French?"

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"My mother was."

"Elise," he said with a small sportive wrench of delight. "I love the sound. It fits you to perfection. My word, you are a beautiful girl."

She glanced casually around. "I'm dry, where's she got the booze this time?"

For a second mystified, then overcome by delight he charmingly laughed, pointing. "There."

"Think she'd keep it in the same place so a person could find it blind," she said. "Well, what're we waiting for."

He started forward with her. "I shall accompany you with pleasure but I drink only fruit juices and what is that, soft drinks."

"Stomach trouble, religion?"

"Religion." And laughing, with a giddy happiness he suddenly performed a little dancing quick-step, screwing up his face at her with an enticing charm. "Forgive me, but I am quite bowled over."

She briefly regarded him with the absence of a jailer watching the futile escape antics of a prisoner and at the bottles helped herself to scotch with a splash of water while he chose a Seven-Up.

Moving off to a side, away from the worst of it she gulped a large swallow and said past a light belch, "Toni says you're studying our peons."

He gazed at her as if just to look excitedly, supremely enchanted him. "Not quite," he said gabbling on a joyous tilt. "I am studying sociology at Stanford University. My word, what a beautiful girl you are. A real smasher."

"The things one learns in those seats of higher whatchamacallit," she said, closed her eyes and leaned back stiff on the wall. Tacking her to windward somewhat, not too rough. Through her closed eyes she could feel him fizzing in front of her.

"An excellent university, yes," he disposed of it. And with a stab of maddened bliss, "But you are without *question* the most beautiful girl I have seen. Please, please may I see your eyes."

They opened, on a stagger. "Precisely," he said confirming with almost a fanged triumph. "In a novel I read it was stated that the heroine's eyes were an angel's blue. I scoffed since rationally they could as well have been brown or green, but now I unreservedly accept the fact of it . . . Oh, but there is an angel's shining about you."

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"Then there's my hair," she said. "Spun gold."

"Yes yes—precisely. And your features, in the classic mold—really I do not know why in America the truly beautiful women with one or two exceptions are not to be found in the films. Those are merely pretty. Shallow tinklers. But you . . . you . . . Oh, I am at a confounded loss of words." And standing on one foot he lifted the other behind him wobbling a little as with a delirious drinking expression his face lowered towards her, on the point of losing his balance bringing his leg back down and making her a deep arm-swinging bow in the nature of a passionate wallow. Yet curiously it wasn't altogether freakish: like a shaft of sun falling on a jungle an appreciable area of feeling was lit up.

"Beauty is as beauty does," Elise said and took another large dose of the scotch. She leaned back on the streaming wall. "So what's your opinion of our culture, if it's not too strong a word."

He raised on tiptoe as if to lift himself above the rising swell and boister, cackle of the party. "Good Lord, it is an intelligent angel in the bargain," he said loud, accusing with appreciation. And coming down slowly on his heels marveled, "You are the first person to refer in that fashion—it is singular is it not that they should resent admitting to flaws when all cultures, being human inventions, are of necessity flawed. Thus *your* flaw is excessive materialism, ours excessive mysticism." Winding up with a lively shrug of the shoulders, "Well then, in brief I should say I am appreciative of American culture while not an enthusiast, primarily I think because in this country the word 'intellectual' has acquired an aura of indecency, do you not find?"

"I find for the accused," she said as it seemed involuntary, with a kind of numbness, and with a lankiness blinked around. But then delivering him a remote-control glance, "After all there's something crummy, not the firstclass ones but those others, with their domed earnestness. Cheeeese."

He made a grab for her hands, laughing with a startled admiration. "Splendid, I instantly recognize the genus. The attitudinizers, yes. All the same my angel there are those who make forays into the outside to drink whiskies and pinch the world's bottom—no, I *like* intellectuals, truly."

"Just thought I'd bring in the niggling human element," she said and leaned back, yanked for the prick of an instant. "Maybe it's different chez vous, but here we're all sick to death of each

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other, you know? Life and death and all that jazz, like a mental heave." Then with a sluttish, naive sway, "But who am I. The hell, poor crapped-up bastards, keeping going on nothing."

He laughed on a tortured burst of love, lust, perplexity. "If you knew how inexpressibly lovely you are, angel of blue and gold, you who are laying waste my poor bloody heart. Oh my heavens. . . ." He stilled like the victim of a holdup, sluggish, his head quivered. With a sleeper's fumbled motion he raised her hand, kissed it, laid it by the side of his: "So gloriously white," he said, quivering. "How good that you did not spoil it by sunbathing."

She stood remarking with a careless depression their two skins, until laying on her waist his trembling hands he softly turned her around so they were reflected in the mirror above the fireplace. "See," he said. "The twain who have met." Joyous tears came brightening, distorting into his eyes. "Oh, I—oh—"

"Ohio, yes, I should say," she said, a diffident nearing little smile forming.

Then her elbow dug him in the ribs. She was grinning. "Pull yourself together, man," she said. "The cavalry are on the way."

He tried for a smile to disguise the wretchedness of a forsaken dog. "You do not believe me because I am sincere. No one here believes me when I am sincere." His hand dashed the tears away. "Ah, you are too much, too much for me. I adored you from the first moment," he said with a deep stitched sigh, resigned.

She cast a draggled look around. "Getting gamey in here—better beat it before the management comes pounding. By an odd coincidence I live right next door."

A startled, then adoring gratitude overran his face but she had started off and single file they tracked through the rout, the voices got whooping out of hand, the smash of a glass, on a fringe a pair of drunks trading punches, butting solemn as goats. Sprawled in a chair a woman sobbed with drunken persistence while a man stood over her making pacific gestures with a glass in each hand. Luckily Toni wasn't in evidence. Elise dodged the lunge the sodden Og made at her and Rob becoming visible through the shifting latticework of bodies she said, "He's mine. We'll collect him and run for it."

"A fine breed, German shepherd. Gentle, trustworthy," said Sri, like a manual.

They found a man with a precariously tilted glass leaning over

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Rob saying with a phlegmed roll, "Deutschland ueber alles." Rob lying at full stretch had his head lazily raised eyeing the man incurious and was about to drop it back when spying Elise he got to his feet and the three of them slipped out.

Closing the door of her apartment Elise turned the key in the lock and led the way into the livingroom. "Made it. If Toni should bang don't pay any attention. She's people-hungry. Other-directed, in the current coinage. Christ, labels. All of 'em phony, like where it says sugar and it's arsenic inside."

Sri threw himself full length on the sofa, stretching in luxury. "Peculiarly, rather a child-dominated society," he said. "Really most puzzling for so industrious and efficient a people. Or is it unreasonable to expect maturity from the majority of adults. Then also, pragmatism may tend to retard the growth of intellectual maturity. . . ."

"Baby, you don't know," said Elise behind the bar fixing herself a screwdriver and a ginger ale for him. "Take the man pays for this layout. Couldn't ask for a more mature specimen. Dotes on responsibility. A rescuer of waifs and strays. Why, I'd be in the gutter. More daddy than sugar, actually."

She carried the glasses to the sofa. Swinging his legs down he took his and set in frankly, avidly to study her. "A girl so beautiful, and clever also," he said wondering, with a sadness but predominantly fascinated.

"Instead she makes do with the other end," she kicked off her pumps and slid down putting her head back. "That's life for you. And death. What's your thought on death, *toi?*"

"A release, a commencement." His hand clasped hers in a soft desirous grasp. "My dearest Elise, you are terribly lovely," he said, both fantasy and passion muted: around his eyes lurked a faint barbaric rarefaction like an inchoate suffering. "Do you know, my angel, I believe I perceive in you a potential mysticism. . . ."

Elise took a long swallow, the shadowy lamplight fuzzing her profile to a lineament of abstraction. "Is there a Suicides Anonymous," she said with a sauntered wag of the head. "I suppose so—not a one of our whims is left unsatisfied. Rushing in to fill one void with another. You need it? We got it."

His head slowly approaching hers hesitated a moment, then continued until the nose of his hazed face came to rest on her cheek. "My eyes are gluttonous of your beauty. Elise, Elise . . . you

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cannot possibly know your bewitchment." His breath warm and clean was like a child's, but with a man's strained shortness.

"So they could get together and discuss ways and means, easiest roads to the great beyond," she said taking another swallow. "But then of course there's always the chance they'd talk it all out and decide not to. Words are tricky bastards."

"Quite so. Your skin of alabaster, your hands like flowers," and he nibbled on a finger. "What an exquisite ring."

"Sapphire. Compliments of my current owner."

"And does he truly love you, is he kind to you?" he worked his lips across the palm of her hand.

"He's never hit me. Not like one of my types who came in one day and gave me a drubbing, saying it'd teach me but not what."

He held her arm out like opening a folding rule, getting the perspective, and sensuously ran a finger up to the elbow. "Never have I seen a skin to approximate this—it is absolutely an idealization of a skin."

"Evidence of things unseen. That part's even better."

The meaning sifting in immobilized him, then suddenly with the ferocious ardor of a man groveling before a deity: "Do not torment me. . . . You could not be cruel, not you. Other girls yes but not you, beloved, never you—"

Raising her head she looked at him down her nose with the fragile scintillance and mystery of a movie queen. "Good gracious, we both knew what was up when we ran out on Toni," she said and kicked him intimately in the ankle. "But I'll just have another drink first. Priming the pump, what it's called."

Feeble he smiled and his eyes hung on her like a train as she went to the bar.

She came back and in a flash he was cozily loving, drawing her close, hugging, patting her all over like a cushion, crooning and gabbling a speech of love as passionate as it was disjointed.

She drank her drink allowing him his play as she would have a puppy, but of a sudden he said in a fainting voice, "Ohh, I love you. Oh my heavens how I love you," and his rounded mouth fell on her neck like a hot petal. But she had lost him somewhere along for some time so she just moved off a little as one does from too importunate a puppy, while like a puppy he clung on.

"Because it's certain to get lousier as it goes along, no getting away from it," she said. "No use fooling around. Either-or, and

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the devil in between." With a scarcely registering annoyance she found that he had uncovered her shoulder and was working on it pet-tiger fashion. "So in the long run it makes sense. The only sense there is, when you analyze it. It's all very well to say, but what do they know. If ignorance is bliss, knowledge is death. Wonder if this guy. Hey there, you with my gland in your hand."

"Oh heavens," he said, and was all over her.

"All right then," she said. "Your need's greater than mine."

Getting up she walked him off stiff-legged, Rob following. "You don't mind him, do you?" she said. "Because of course they don't know. I suppose. If they do they approve. All for the natural life."

"An utter love," he muttered holding on, sliding his hand up and down her front, not offensive, only to the navel. "Utter precious bewitching love."

In the bedroom she stripped, with a run leapt on the bed and rolled herself up in a ball. "Come along, baby," she said. "Don't be so slow on the drawer." But when he came up a bit diffident in his slender brown nudity his eye met hers peering up at him, a bright-blue bloodshot marble, and he paused. "This is how it was in the womb," she said and snuggled her face into her drawn-up knees. "Some ancient races buried like this too. Try it. Feels good."

Crawling in a trifle self-conscious he looked on as if undecided whether or not to smile, becoming then unknowing an observer of a darkened meditating tenderness.

"Feels good, honest," she said muffled, the golden hair shining in the light over the bed with a rioted childish frailness.

"My dearest," he said gently making no move to touch her, and presently she peered up at him with a gleam of cockeyed insight, unwound and brought her upper body down on his. Staring with a kind of jaded curiosity into his love-warm, lazy eyes as into a mirror she said, "Who knows, it might even be a success. If the cycles are right."

With a soft unsteady passion his hand stroked her back. "My most beloved angel. Words cannot express—"

"They never do. Deeds, baby. Incidentally, would you be ambisextrous?"

"Eh?" His hand stopped.

"Take on male or female. A new fad, starting to catch on."

"Good Lord no. How could one, when it is so good like this. *Oh* so very good." He groaned with ecstasy, squirming.

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"Just checking. Okay, ready?"

"Yes, oh *yes*. . . ."

Her mouth lowered in a sweet rough grinding. From the outer dark sounded the thump of Rob's scratching leg followed after a space by the low wrung-off yowl of his yawn, his licking settling chops.

And silence, of a sort.

"Oh my darling," said Sri, on his back and his eyes sliding away and closing in ecstasy. "Oh, oh, oh. . . ."

Propped on an elbow with her cheek in her hand she watched him, smoking. "You're a nice kid," she said. "But you sure go all out. Whyn't you save some for the next round."

His eyes opened and darkly barbaric rolled round to her. "Beloved," he said on a moan, like a sick man. "Beloved beloved beloved," and crawled dragging the weight of his love over to her.

He left towards dawn protesting his love and rapture—he acted like a man hounded by happiness—("Don't call me," she said. I'll call you—") and she slept on and off till nearly nine which was better than average and lay waiting for Nettie to show. Who blew in at a quarter past on a rush of excuses: the bus again, they didn't no way know how to run a transportation rout, that was for sure, her brown face wearing its usual hectic anxiousness. She dashed off to put on the coffee water and draw the bath while Elise had a quick one to start off on, which even with the first hot shudder was one of the nicer things of the day. Then breakfast, three cups of coffee, nothing solid with her peckish stomach, at the window with the View to the gaze and after that Toni bursting in indignant because her showpiece had been snatched. "Honey, how lousy—I said *entertain* him not kidnap," and in the next breath said come downtown, want to buy one of those new bucket hats and we'll have lunch and rustle around see who else we can scare up.

Getting back around three she put the leash on Rob and drove out to Sutro Heights. One of those terrific days when the whole city under a free-swinging wind had the translucence of things seen through clear ice, everywhere a flap and toss and glitter, a gloss to the buildings as if they had sprung new-made out of the ground. And currents of energy in the air like a vast electric network—the kind of day that made some people swear because their hats blew off and others want to leap in the streets. A bad day for the incitement of alcoholics and potential suicides, and people in love.

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Hardly anybody out on the Heights where the wind ripped and streamed, shook and flung the trees like a furious spirit released for one day of magnificent destruction. Barking his elation Rob raced up the path now and then turning to see if she was coming, rushing on with a bound of dizzied joy and freedom.

She let him run himself out before going on out to the point where in one great sweeping disclosure ocean and sky came rising up, the sheet-metal water striking away the eyes. Away off to the left boiled the spray-misted beach on which crept a few solitary figures, with nearer at hand the powered heave, curl-over of green glass and foam-toothed onslaught petering out on the sand in overlapping caracoles that sloped up to a bubbled nibble mild and poignant, the exhausted end. Out on their rocks the seals took the sun, about the Cliff House people congregated, fell away, formed fresh groupings like insects carrying out an intricate project. Up the street the Victorian dome of Sutro Baths stood out quaint and somehow dismal, like a building where a crime has been committed. Farther along on the other side Playland wasn't doing much playing: onion-sizzle, spin and lurch and dazzle, rifle-plink and lopsided revolving blare was for the shoddy glamor of the night, neon-stain smudged by the mist, lone seawind tumbling candy-wrappers—sailors and teen-agers, older folk come to gamble, couples snaking off into a hot-oil metal black and coming out shift-faced, having gone the crooked circle. And over it all light or dark the sword of the wind, and the sense of paucity, the starved grasping for what didn't have a name—full stop, and the beginning of nowhere.

Her gaze went back to the scaled sea, the sky whose clear strong blue deepened in the west to a silken burning. The wind punched at her, blew the hair wanton about her face. Her eyes stung with cold, her ears ached, but she stood on braced before the parapet with Rob leaning his shoulder on her knee.

Unannounced as always it came on, then—the thrown darkening, growing tumor of nightmare. Very gently, almost caressingly the ground swelled and dipped, she lost her footing an instant, clumsily regained it. A knotted interval, and like a blow from behind, the silence. Slicing of the cord. Shut in, closed off. Bone in the earth. Shell at the bottom of the sea.

Bludgeoned Christ-dangle.—

Now. Now. Scalpel, prying: collapsed loosening like bowels—a hemorrhage of light poured.

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Far down in the core of the earth, thunder.

Slow, mammoth the intermeshed movement. Crust, grind down. Gray slime of brain, meat pulped glistening the warm blood, gut twined loving in the shard of bone. Wormed mass, grave-drip—take, stuff in the sodden flesh bottle-green, gorge on the purple-toed meat of the obscene Christ and jazzed cathedral lights flying in crossed trajectory—

"You all right, miss?"

Raw cut of danger: retreating in confusion, the accelerated beginning descent. "What—"

"You seem faint, may I help you to a bench."

"No." She made speech from marble lips. "It's all right. Thanks."

The cataract, terraced strip-off. Bearing her derelict self gone over irreversible to the crumbling, a vague driveled solace in the knowledge her eyes bungled at a sweep-back of silver hair under a crush hat, black lair-thick eyes and brows, pink and white skin fed by the cream of self-esteem. Black overcoat with velvet collar, cane. Large gestures around a gleaming dinnertable—old-time impresario, and/or molester of shopgirls.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like to sit down."

"No, I'm all right. Dizzy spell. Nothing to speak of."

He smiled, the carved wrinkles jumping to attention. "Surely. We all have, at some time or other—that's a nice dog you've got there. Here sir, here. I'm very much of a dog fancier myself."

"I'm afraid he doesn't take to strangers," she said, and began to saunter off. "Well. Time to go." She put a bit of an effort into making a pleasant face.

He tipped his hat. "Good afternoon," turning of course to watch the careful stagger. Drunk. Such a lovely girl. Great pity.

In a small sunny hollow she dropped down on the sand with her back against a bank and gradually the feeling of walking on balloons passed away. Her eyes closed, taking the good warm sun, ignoring the rear-guard skirmish. A moisture seeped out rolling cool and erratic down her cheeks. The wind. Stimulus on the duct —ductless—anyway it was good, the impersonal undertaker handling of it "You like it too boy don't you," she said not bothering to wipe off the moisture, sun take care of it. Panting already a little from the sun and then he yawned, ran his tongue around his mouth and looked at her: what next.

She laughed and pulled him to her. "Rob," she said, "Rob," and

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found that she was shaking, shaking him too along with her. His tongue flipped out to her cheek. She hugged him hard. "We'll go in a little while," she said and suddenly there was a stony swell of excitement like heartburn—she grew still, her arm around him jogging to his panting. Then abruptly she rose and they walked off, but glancing at her watch she broke into a run and Rob into a lope alongside.

At a bend under the trees she ran square into a young man, rocking him, almost knocking him down. Steadying his hands grasped her shoulders, and swiftly his stare of annoyance gave way to a softening, a mellowing, and then the mold to a deep-lighted smile. In a moment with a twist she was free and running on up the path.

Panting, a pain in her side, she rested a minute in the car before turning the key, dizzy, but it soon quit and they were off on a jack-rabbit start.

At three minutes to five she opened the door, listened—beat him to it, and sprinted in to the bar. Putting the empty shot glass down she heard him at the door. She just had time to fling off her jacket, light a cigarette and sit down with a magazine.

"Hi there," she said and rose to get him the sherry he had lately taken to having on arrival. And that he made last a long while, taking small sips and toying with the stem. You could see he really didn't go for the stuff but it went with the stance and served to loosen him up some besides—he hadn't got over a certain stiffness at first and usually it wasn't till after dinner that he unlimbered. And naturally nothing so obvious as a kiss on entering, after all he was no Frenchman or even anything like the man to flaunt an emotion. For it looked as if that night in Wim's study had proved to be the impetus from which he was still revolving but on a narrower orbit, adjusted to the proper discretion and reserve. Which moreover if you cared to look at it that way tended to put *her* in the proper perspective of things. And why not, part of the job.

"Well, dear," he said as she came up bearing the sherry. "Have a nice day?"

With her bending to set down the glass a frown, a very small one, made its appearance. There, see. Should have stuck to the vodka. However it smoothed off and he regarded her calmly, a wide calm solid man—the benignity still there but not nearly so

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detectable any more—attendant upon a problem he had lived with for some time and had no doubt he could solve. When he judged the time to be ripe. Which from the look of it could be any time now, and she couldn't say it was unexpected.

"Pretty good," she said. "I had lunch with Toni and furnished moral support while she bought a hat. Then I took Rob over to Sutro. You should have seen the wind. Like to tear you apart."

"We usually get it around this time," he said, and dipped into the sherry.

"Run out of cigars? I can send for some." By this time he'd usually lighted one.

"I've decided to give up smoking. All this lung cancer, and other diseases. It's foolish to take chances."

"Thought cigarettes were supposed to be the culprit," she said, conversational.

His glance lowered to hers. "The evidence certainly seems conclusive that they're very dangerous. It would be wise to cut down, if you can't or won't quit. Two packs a day is suici—is entirely too much."

"You can say it, Richard. I don't mind a bit. My one silly little gesture, goodness. I thought it was long buried and forgotten."

A complimentary urbanity spread over his face. "I like to see you taking that sensible attitude, dear. I will say this way you have of not brooding is just about your most attractive trait," he said with the fine gloss of a man who perfectly trusts his intuitions.

"Well thank you, Richard. But you're an optimist yourself. It's our great American heritage, think where our pioneers would have been without it. Pessimism simply isn't in us."

"For which we should be everlastingly grateful," he said going rather into the mature overseer, or flock-addressing bit. "Defeatism will always be alien to us. This existentialist rottenness, for instance." Of all things to get around to, gee. "I feel kind of sorry for a man like that French fellow, Sartre—I started to read one of his things and had to quit—who's degenerated that far. It takes a warped brain to go against the grain of its own great tradition and culture."

"Doesn't it. Not so long ago though they were shooting down Arab women and children, which does seem kind of a funny end result of a culture. But now if you don't mind Richard I think I'll have a drink to celebrate our being so well in accord," she said

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rising and going to the bar. "Which we are practically all the time, when you think. What I mean, pretty unheard-of in this quarreling world, wouldn't you say?"

Abruptly, in almost a harsh tone he said, "That's the Communist line," but in a moment moderating his expression to a kind of upper-class reticence.

Going back to her chair she swallowed a good third of her highball and smacked her lips. "Mm, good. What kind things it does." And looked over at him sociably, disposed to pass the time in a civilized manner. "Is it? No, actually any resemblance is purely coincidental. Just that it does look like a whimsical way to bring civilization to the untutored masses."

He gazed back congealing in composure, every inch the informed man of affairs dealing with a fowlbrained female. Of distinction you couldn't quite say, first because of the too too solid flesh. If he shed about forty pounds. But no, since thick or thin the parvenu quality would remain, legacy no doubt of the grubbing ancestor on whom nonetheless his own brand of plucky vulgarity must have looked rather good, aside from being an indispensable in that bearded milieu: a bona fide rawness packed its own picturesque punch. While Richard here, with his sad little crust of nice-nellyism. But hold on there, gal. Come now, be nice to the man, the stranger in our midst.

She said, "So here we are, the two of us with our drinks and the sun setting beyond the Golden Gate just like in the ads," and looked out the window. "Sure is a hell of a view. Whenever I look at it this time of day I get that wanton Frisco feeling—worldly, but with verve. Sort of rich-meaty. As if something in the air said get going and do all the good things fast—*live,*" she made a devil-may-care squandering gesture, "in a word."

Didn't fetch a thing. Maybe he didn't fancy the Frisco, they were so touchy about it. Or more likely the honeymoon was over. Time was when he'd at least have sent out a mild beam, if only from good manners, but now nothing, except his sausage finger kept sliding sedate up and down the stem of his glass. Then in the dusking light she took note of the subtle frown, of a sort of sublime concentration, way off somewhere: wrong, in effect quite close to home, for just then with a level air he said, "Elise,—I feel there's something I should talk to you about."

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"Really," she said, interested. "I'm listening."

For a second his level gaze dug in on her like a brand, then it paled back to normal. "It concerns this woman, this—Toni. I have no intention of regulating your choice of friends. But this woman and her crowd aren't the kind of people I'd care to have you associate with. A divorcee—"

"Three times, and a fabulous settlement from each."

"A divorcee," he said ploughing on past the irrelevance, "can of course also be a decent person, but from my impression of this woman I don't think she can do you any good. Frankly I consider her a bad moral influence. The manager's received complaints about those parties of hers, and he told me not long ago he'd be glad to get her out of the building. As a matter of fact and strictly between us he's going to try to break her lease. In view of all this don't you think it would be wise to taper off, when she asks you to go out with her you could say you have other plans. And I must ask you not to go to any more of her parties. I understand there was one last night."

"Oh, I didn't stay long. An hour, maybe less."

"I'm sorry you went at all. A bad crowd, very bad. Ever since that woman moved in the place hasn't been the same. I'm surprised they allowed her in in the first place, and if they don't get her out soon I guess I'll have to move my girl to better quarters," he said giving a hitch to his trouser leg, and on his face a look close to a kind of arid archness.

"Well, I'm only a woman," she said. "Do with me what you will."

But he wasn't amused, where back in the beginning her every quip had brought his smile. Definitely a case of the honeymoon being over. "I hardly think that was called for," he said.

She traced the hair-fine sneer of sensitivity, lost almost among the solidity. Funny too how he rarely came out with his sweetests and belovedests anymore. Always dear nowadays. Well, maybe she did cost him more than he'd expected. "By way of a gag, all it was," she said. "To jazz it up some. Been turning all-fired serious lately, hasn't it?"

A stolidly enduring look moved in on him: most of his expressions took time rising, like yeast. "I've always been a serious person," he said. "It should have been obvious from the start."

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"Can't say it wasn't. But a mistress's touch, you know. Supposed to bring out the frolic in a man. Or so goes the tradition."

She stood up well, never batting an eye under the long unmoving stare that ten to one caused junior executives to freeze in their flannel suits and women secretaries to run for a bit of quiet hysteria in the washroom. Blowing their nose on the toilet paper and flushing it down the bowl, wishing peevishly murderous *he* were along—

Then she noticed another thing: underlying the stare she caught like a furtive movement in the dark, an attenuated equivalent of what had blazed out of the face of the woman in the drugstore. Universality of hate and contempt. Rich, poor, everybody knew how to hate. While it was the rare ones who knew how to love. So much easier, more instinctive to hate. *Wanting* to love didn't do it, on that you could rely. Had to be learned, step by painful twisted step. Herself, high on the roster of accomplished, or intuitive haters. Or as the poet had it, *trau, schau, wem?* Eh? *Ach, du lieber.*

"Elise." Could as well have said Miss Lynch.

"Yessir."

And as he said no more but continued to look, with a hardening of the eyes: "Sorry, no flippancy intended. I seem to be in an unhandleable mood today, like my psyche took the bit in its teeth—ever feel anything of the sort?"

Silence, the lump of it. No steering around this Scylla. And as for Charybdis, yonder—get to you in due course.

"Well, you're lucky," she said. "Possibly due to my bad genes. Put the blame on heredity, so much easier. But enough of these puerile interruptions. You were saying."

The square bulk of his shoulders rose a fraction, moved back in place like a bull quietly rebelling against a weight. "Elise," he said, in tone and manner on the grim side but restrained of course, gentleman's disagreement, "Elise, you force me to have a serious talk with you. I had hoped it wouldn't be necessary, thinking that if you were given enough rope you'd straighten yourself out. But I'm sorry to say it's been just the opposite."

"Richard, you're quite right. People like me should never be given any rope, they think it's to hang themselves with."

With no change in his voice and looking the same, only more so he said, "I'd appreciate it one hell of a lot if you'd consent to

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be serious for ten minutes. What I've got to say is for your own good, and if you'll use the sense you've got you'll listen to me. Your refusal to face facts stopped being amusing some time ago, and I think I'm justified in saying that any other man would have lost patience long before this. I've had a lot more experience of life than you have—"

"Of a somewhat dissimilar kind, Richard. But do go on. Merely wanted to keep things straight."

"Which is exactly what you should concentrate on doing from now on. You're—it's not pleasant to say it, but it's got to be said—you're not the same girl you were, the girl I saw standing on those stairs. In a relatively short time there's been a change in you, a very great change. You're young, basically healthy I'm certain, it shouldn't be hard to put yourself back on the right track."

"I know," she said in a tone of polite discovery. "What you're trying to say is I'm rather too fond of the drink."

"You understate it. What I'm trying to say is that you're well on the road to alcoholism."

"Richard, it's nice of you to try and spare my feelings. Truth is I'm there. Why, if you knew," she said. "I can't face the day without a stiff shot, half a glass full. Water glass. When you've come to that, well."

"I thought you had agreed to be serious."

"I am. Dead serious. You don't see any smile, do you? Course it's getting dark, but—"

"And I can assure you I'm not smiling either. In plain talk, and I don't know how I can say it any more clearly, you haven't got much more time to pull yourself together. It's—getting more than objectionable, I'll go so far as to say I'm seriously disappointed in you. Yet if you'll show me you're really in earnest about pulling out I'll do what I can to help. There are treatments, all kinds of aids. Others have been helped, have gone on to become better men and women. If they did it so can you. Now listen, Elise. You can't doubt that I'm—that I think a great deal of you. You've given me quite a lot of pleasu—happiness. I'll go further and say that I've come in a way to depend on you. But this degrading drinking business has simply got to stop. Now. Before you completely wreck your beauty and health." He paused, and when he spoke again a note of quiet anger nullified the intent of persuasiveness. "I just can't understand why you insist on throwing everything away

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when with some plain ordinary will power you could overcome this weakness. Once you've taken the first step the rest will be easy. If you really want to, I know you can do it."

Here the tone became more stabilized as he went along on his faith kick for a spell, but it all flowed on by pretty well after the pleasu-happiness bit. Because translated it meant she was a damn good lay, best one he'd had in all probability, otherwise he'd have shown her the exit long ago. Stinking of drink way she did when he went to fold her in those mattress arms even though she rinsed her mouth out beforehand. And showered in perfume. My Sin. *And* his, for the record. But he could close his eyes in that sublime-torture look while she had to peg away at the job, keep the rear end mobile and play it from all angles so as to keep him happy and well evacuated—damn near died from the ecstasy of it and then lay gasping and heaving like a beached whale. Christ she *deserved* a drink. All right, so he didn't care for her boozy breath. Well neither did she, particularly. But as long as she was able to deliver that was all really counted. Stink or no, once it got to working and the delicious agony shivers flashing around his belly who gave a crumpet. Assuredly not lover-boy. "So how if we can the sentiment, Richard," she said. "And keep our eye on the balls and the hind end in proper oiled operating condition. Which is my fuck-uppation, to get coarse for a moment, and yours is to keep me in Black Label. And one or two other necessaries. Thing is, you're worried if I go on belting the mash I'll lay down on the job. But trust me, man. I been trained by experts. You never heard of a firehorse not rearing at the bell."

She noticed his voice had stopped. "Well, Richard, thanks for the pep talk," she said. "And if you're as fond of me as you say you won't object to my having another before we feed, I'm sure. Small short one, or rather medium would be better. You wouldn't want to stop cold this minute, too drastic. D.t.'s likely to result."

In the gloom he could be felt more or less grimly coping, so to take it out of his hands she went to the bar. Silence, of the more bitter kind. Then he said, "I can't very well stop you, can I. But you've got to promise you'll put yourself under treatment."

She grinned, slopping some token water into the glass. "Well now, you know, I'm pretty strong. Good for some time yet. Really you shouldn't let it fidget you. Man like you, all those investments to worry about, fussing about little old me, goodness." Glass in

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hand she went and sat on the arm of his chair. "The thing with you is you're getting kind of restless," she said. "In the midst of trust funds we are in death. You ought to get yourself a hobby. Like another girl. Then you'd have two of us to fuss with. Take up the slack, like."

A pause. Could be he'd revolved it and decided against. Question of expense, not improbably. Reason the rich were. Moreover, required a certain amount of daring.

Then he was shaking his head, his arm going loglike about her waist. "You don't know me very well, if you can talk like that. My happiness is with you, dear . . . So you *won't* promise."

"Oh, catch 'em young and they'll train your way. Can I get you another sherry?"

But of course he said one was enough. She tossed off her scotch. "Say, I know what. We'll eat out. Here we are in this city of gourmandism and how often have we joined the public trough—twice is it. New place opened on Hyde very Frenchy is the word where it's doubtful anyone'd catch us. Anyway you can always say I'm your niece. Crude I know, but one's got to think of these things."

His silence while consenting also had a constraint, main reason being a worry that if he flaunted her about the missus might take it into her head to raise a stink: scandal, divorce, depleted coffers. Gloomy inbitten sort of woman, from picture in the society section. Type could take a notion to do anything. Wrote verses, only thing he'd ever said about her. With a touch of complaisance grafted on to the armistice kind of enmity. An artistic wife what with temperament and all excusing many a man's peccadilloes.

"I'll go gussy up, won't take but ten minutes," she said.

"But first," and his finger put nervous-roguish pressure on her waist. She swung her legs over and slid down on his lap: not the kind of gambit meant business, he didn't care to exert himself this early. Sort of an imprimatur rather, mouth warm and rubbery-moist as a hot dog. When with a certain complacence he released her she said, "Ask the man who owns one," and went off whistling Shake That Thing.

On her return exquisite in the mink he rose and gazed with the blur of infatuation at the core of which was something of a checked resistance: moments lately when he positively set himself against her for her beauty and above all, her youth. Christ, she said. This

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beatup bag a million years old. And to him: "Will I do? Nobody'd take me for a strumpet, would they?"

"You look very nice," he said, and went with dignity to get his hat. They went down and got in the Continental.

At the restaurant she let it be known she wouldn't refuse a cocktail, however it came as no surprise when he said it would spoil her appetite. "I want you to eat a good hearty dinner, dear," he said. "You're getting so thin and pale. With some flesh on you you'll look and feel so much better."

And that much more energy for the bedwork. However, one didn't argue—his privilege.

"I'll order for us both," he said. "You sit there looking pretty," a kind of affability went with it, "and sharpen that appetite."

So she sat watching the trays loaded with cocktails go by. And when the food came tried to wade into the opulent sauced stuff for which she had no stomach, while at a regular untiring pace he fell to working his way through.

There was no talk, this eating rite commanding all his attention. All about the elegant room others were likewise engaged, bent obeisant to the plate or chewing with a misted gaze as though the food's inner steaming clouded their vision. And soon the air rich with food-incense in the templed light, the waiters gliding with their offertory trays, the headwaiter presiding with a sharp sacerdotal eye began to have a somnolent, shrinking effect—suddenly she could hardly push the fork up to her mouth.

She started to feel dizzy, queasy, and then a sudden plunged drop into a fatigue pocket caused the food on the plate to loom like a mountain on which the fork couldn't get so much as a toehold. She raised her eyes and the sickeningly ornate room was set in motion as though it had been placed on a merry-go-round, the diners rising and falling in stately distortion. Closer, across the shining white cloth upon which the lamp pooled a rosy light like diluted blood, the silver gleaming like expectant weapons, the faintly levitating man continued to eat ponderous, systematic as a boa gorging its prey.

"Eat," he said, "eat," he murmured flushed, copious, a seed-pearl sweat standing out on his forehead and even around his eyes. Tranced, congested they went to her plate. "Good for you. Eat."

In her hand the fork lay inert at the base of the mountain. Segment by segment the mass of food disappeared into the erratically

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floating rapacious mouth, with a neat tail-flip at the end and the lips closing down smooth grease-glistening over the crushing jaws.

Nausea rushed together, fumed up. Stumbling to her feet she mumbled an excuse and was off, reaching the bowl without a second to spare.

Drained, shaky she found her way back. "Anything wrong?" he said. He had finished his dessert and lighted a cigar. "To go with the coffee," he said a shade curt. "After such a wonderful meal." His eyes sharpened. "There *is* something wrong."

"I heaved," she said. "If you'll pardon the expression. Guess I'll have to stay away from this rich stuff."

He sized her up through a snarl of smoke, the cigar sticking out of his mouth like a small club: his hand stroked up and removed it.

"I've been expecting it to happen any time. You're going to get sick, seriously sick if you go on. I wish you could see yourself. You look half dead." Master's voice dry, dry and hardened, baked on slow anger. Dragged contempt in the eyes, in the slant of the cigar in the power-fleshed hand.

Considerable outlay. Done everything for her. And all because of stubbornness, stupidity—bad blood after all. Maverick, never take a brand.

"All that and more," she said. "No really Richard I see your point. The right is on your side, no question."

"You won't make the slightest effort to stop. You never will."

Bulked, strapped taut and firm in his integrity he expanded, grown larger with the authority of rank. A big man. Leader in the community. Good works. At death, obituaries this long. Of such is the kingdom.

"Poor Wim," she said. "He may not have made it. Too much the shepherd at heart, when organizers is what's wanted."

"You're still drunk. You went to have a drink, didn't you . . . *Didn't* you."

At any rate he still had his good cigar to enjoy. There was a large crap-colored gravy spot by the side of his coffee cup. "Well," she said. "It's like this."

"Answer me straight for once. *Didn't* you."

"I went straight and had a big slug in the bar. It's around the turn there, convenient to the can. Then I went and heaved it up and went back for a refill."

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His eyelids came down, blanking his face in a sort of vicious pondering. Then he turned and signaled the waiter, a motion peremptory and harsh as an obscene gesture.

All the way in the car, not a word. Upstairs along the hall like warden and condemned prisoner. Rob came forward wagging and, it could have been accident, the man's knee bumped him hard in the side. She dropped back as he went on into the living-room and squatting took the rough-smooth dogface in her hands. "Don't mind it, boy," she said. "Happened to me too lots of times. Sit tight. We'll go out later."

He gave heed with his customary solid rapport. Dropping a kiss on his ear she proceeded to the livingroom, where slipping out of the mink she said to the held-up newspaper, "What'll it be, scrabble, gin?"

"I thought your taste ran to scotch," the voice issued dry from behind the print.

"Well, vodka's nice too," she said, and went to the bar.

"By all means, help yourself. Take all you want. When it's gone call up for more. They deliver day and night."

"Like me," she said. And laughed, sound of gay abandon. "Gay abandon," she said pouring the vodka. "Name for a bra. More fun at night though isn't it. In the morning too much like champagne for breakfast."

He was looking at her where she stood drinking, over his paper, and she said, "Richard, it'll all come out in the leak. Believe me."

It got through. Throwing off a laugh vulgar with revulsion he said, in a new voice, a level run with no inflection, "Come here. Come on here to daddy."

She went, remembering first to down the vodka. He took hold and pulled her down. "Sweetheart," he said, in the voice. "Baby girl."

There was only one light on, from the side. It fell on her breast and left both their faces in a pink overcast in which his with a commencing faint pullback, as though exposed to a savage wind, a dim peaked frown stared at the pale-gold flesh offering twin hummocks perversely virgin, shatterable. Then the hair-knuckled hand entered the light and lay weighted, twitching, blotting—pressed down, lifted, pressed down.

A quiver, as through a great steamer. "Baby girl. Sweetheart. Come to daddy. Come—Give. Come. Come."

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Cigar-rancid, widening cave of vellicating snake tongue. The forcep hand dug, ripped the fabric, shook, spilled. "Baby girl. Baby."

She held fast, rigid against the rising constriction of pain.

"Hurry. *Hurry*."

The laying on of massive flamed hands.

She screamed.

"Baby. Baby girl." Mutter grinding, grunted. "Baby—Baby—Mine—"

She screamed.

In a white silk dressing gown she sat on the bed with a glass and a cigarette facing the other way from the circumspect large-animal movement going on methodical—comb drop, clink of silver, thud-pattern of the controlled sedate feet.

Coming around, halting. Her eyes hitched up the length of the mannerly bulk, from the polished black shoes orderly on the carpet to the perfect exactitude of the tie.

"Sweet. You look about ten in that thing."

The white face stared up, directed, the blue eyes full of light.

A laugh. "Come, I'll tuck you in before I go."

The golden head moved, negative. "Not yet. I'll go soon."

"You won't stay up late, will you. Got to get that beauty sleep."

They kept on looking at each other.

"Sweet. My sweet. Mine."

Deep sag of the bed alongside, and inside the silk the warm bloated hand stroked. "Say it. Say you belong to me."

"I belong to you."

In spasms, brutal-soft the hand pressed and molded the flesh. "You're mine. Say it."

She said it.

The hand slowly came away, was joined by the other to draw and belt the silk over the inflamed and bleeding flesh. Pause, a concentrate of powerful tranquil repletion.

"I want you to go to bed now. Sleep. Sleep deep and good."

"Yes," she said.

The bed slowly rose, snapped in place frivolous.

"Go to sleep now."

The feet in black distinguished shoes, kindly-august side by side. And then empty space, and the crushed twin imprint.

She stood in the shadowed hallway. Blood trickled down her

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somewhere and the darkness billowed. Then Rob was there. She fell down on her knees and said something, the rough coat under her hand. His tongue flicked out and a wet coolness touched her cheek.

Then she was in the bedroom throwing on some clothes and she said, "Be right there," but shaking so much it was hard to go fast, then she remembered and ran to get it out of the closet, holding the heavy coil of it in her hand. Cigarettes—yes there and the lighter for Christ's sake get going get—

"Come on boy run—"

"Sailing along, on moonlight bay," sang the radio. And it was, smooth and easy on the maternal purr in the crouch of the late late night. In time for the late late show.

"What's the thing happens at the same time to many people at different times."

No answer.

"TV show, darling. Live. You live but a show's live. English is a ridiculous language."

The radio sang low in the glow of the dashboard. "I love you," she said. "For being so strong and silent. Keeps right on, drop by drop. Drip, warm, drip. Trickle, tickle. So I *do* know how to love. Where love is due. In lieu of. Mauve. Lovely color. Muller. Boy wrote me mash notes. Engemmed with acne. Took off the umlaut and there he was, virtually British."

The car just drove itself, rolling up the carpet miles. Oil and rubber. Rubbers. Evil flowers of the night growing by the wayside. Among the empty beer cans and whiskey fifths. J'accuse Mother Nature.

Nobody, nobody in all the. "Save the two of us. Sunken bloody world drowning in its own semen. Poetry. A word for everything. Where science, cosmic—the cosmic, the comic probe. Proboscis. Ora pro nobis. Novice. No, not that one. Expert, and that large Italian knows-what's-what nose to prove it. Maria, Mariucia. Eh, Mariucia. Putta somewhere else da stiletto, it makea da hole in you stocking. Sorry, lady. I am an admirer of the Gracchi. Sure you do. Gracchi Bros., the pasta makers. *Ecco*."

A truck roared down the stretch, crashed past.

A yell: "Go." He gave a short joyful bark, the speedometer jumped and climbed seventy, eighty, ninety. Ripping the night in

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two and the tatters streaming haggard, smashing forward and the world left mangled and bloody behind.

Yelling, so damn much alive it kicked around inside like a thousand devils. He barked, pitchforked by excitement—screaming in the curves, swaying and lurching into the straight and the wheel sliding from side to side and the rock and roll, buck and reel, righting the forward plunge once more and suddenly the screeching skid: recollected swerve on to humped dirt.

"Now's the time," she said, "and this is the place."

Bump and sway, towards a gather of tall grave trees.

Here. Good. The motor sighed off. Instantly crickets, frogs took over. Smelled good, of eucalyptus and night earth.

Out, and he bounded off for a run. Overhead the light clack of leaves turning silver bellies to the moon. A spray of stars in their tiny immensity, and the sweet play of the breeze. Except for the fiddling crickets it was still, good: the night breathed deep and easy like God.

He trotted back and she opened the door for him, shut it and went back to the trunk, dragged out the coil and dumped it on the earth, where it lay like a great snake. Squatting she took hold of one end and went to work but it was a job getting it on, her hand was too impatient: "Goddam," she said through a grunt, "toujours le—" But then it held good and tight, she dragged the length of it around to the front and feeding it in through the window said, "See, you *can* pull the hole in after you."

She turned the key and the engine sprang on with a hitch, settled and murmured even.

Supposed to be a fifth in the glove compartment. After the good long lasting pull she dropped it in her lap and took him up close to her.

"Because I love you it's all right," she said. "Thank God you trust me."

He whimpered a little but she held him and he quieted, leaning on her. Long and gentle she kissed him and faced forward past the tree clot to where the moon lapped light. Holes in the ground here and there, black as eye-sockets.

She scrounged down resting her head on the back of the seat, and took a deep relaxed breath. "Okay, lady," she said in a grinned rounded-off voice. "But it's me that wins."

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NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Film, Metafilm, and Un-Film

"The Theatre of the Absurd," the term popularized by Gelber, has become the common nomenclature, and that, I think, is unfortunate. Though Mr. Gelber is one of the nobler practitioners of the art (or non-art), though the term carries with it a certain gallantry, it is nevertheless pretty poor: one might as well call cubism the painting of the absurd, *and* surrealism *and* expressionism. The term covers too much, and it connotes an error: this century is really not much more absurd than its predecessor or the one before that.

"Metatheatre" (Mr. Lionel Abel's term) tells us a good deal more. In "metaphysics," "metacriticism," "metapolitics," the "meta-" seems to suggest not only the original Greek that meta-X is X moving toward more-than-X, but also, in modern usage, that meta-X plays, toys, flirts with being X alone. Thus, we tend to assume (in our mimetic tradition) that theatre portrays reality. Metatheatre takes off from this portrayal-theatre and plays against it in the tradition of Pirandello. Because metatheatre, insofar as it is successful, destroys its own foundation, the audience's "set" toward a mimetic theatre, those troubled by it can take comfort: metatheatre should be an unusually short-lived genre.

Metatheatre, however, leads us into a Promised Land of which Pirandello offers but a dim glimpse: an imitation of nature for an age of psychology. All metatheatre plays (so far as I know) can be explicated as the quite literal and highly realistic playing-out of a psychological (usually psychoanalytic) proposition: Secondary processes of language and number derive from primary processes of sex and aggression *(The Lesson)*. Man is a player of eroticized (or cathected) rôles *(Balcony)*. Language defines its own logic which provides a basis for the displacement and isolation of experience *(Bald Soprano)*. Body enslaves mind, each defeating the other, when there is no focus outside the self to do the enslaving *(Godot)*. Man connects with other men through spontaneous acts *(Connection)*. And so on. In this sense, metatheatre is, if anything, far too literal and simple-minded. These psychological propositions stand to the plays as the "morals" do to Aesop or the *Gesta Romanorum*. Metatheatre is purely and simply the twentieth-century development of the *Everyman*-tradition, the modern amorality-play.

I realize that in talking about plays, I am poaching on John Simon's preserve, and I am loath to run against his sharp pen, but I feel the need to marshal every justification I can for what I am about to con-

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fess: I liked *Last Year at Marienbad.*[1] In fact, I liked it very, very much. This film simply happened to me; its sheer visual beauty washed over me, leaving me gasping and quite unable to sustain the essential defense industry of criticism and analysis at the time. And I need defending. Dwight Macdonald, *existimator ardens,* objects that "one's mind and senses are stimulated" but there is no "affective life": the characters are reduced to A, X, and M. Stanley Kauffmann, *arbiter callidus,* complains that the film "tries to reproduce actual inner life instead of distilling it," that "Resnais' efforts lead only to duplication of experience."[2] *The New Yorker* resorted to parody. Liking *Marienbad* has become a pretty lonely thing to do. My consolation, a small one, is that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has not declared himself.

In the cocktail arena, where, in the last analysis (and analysis is last), the most direct and honest film criticism goes on, reactions varied from outrage to boredom; the stimulus, however, was invariably the same—bafflement. (Local joke: one Harvard undergraduate to another, "Have you seen *Last Year at Marienbad?*" The other, slowly, thoughtfully: "I—don't know.") As a way of getting at this bafflement, let me point out that Kauffmann and Macdonald, both of whose judgments of the film, I think, are well thought and felt, are nevertheless giving quite contradictory reasons for their common response, that the film was cold: Kauffmann, that Robbe-Grillet and Resnais are trying to reproduce mental life too literally; Macdonald, that the film is "the pure depiction of scenes and actions without any hint of the psychological processes in the characters."

This dilemma resolves itself once we recognize that the film portrays, not mental life itself, or psychological processes, but propositions about mental life. In short, I am saying this is not film, but metafilm. It will be baffling, incoherent, just as metatheatre or a fable of Aesop will be, unless understood as a portrayal of a psychological proposition, but if so understood, it will make perfect sense. Whether it will also seem less cold, I do not know—I suspect not—but at least the emotions arising from bafflement can be sidestepped. Let me concede at the outset that Robbe-Grillet heaps contempt on this kind of analysis (if his phrase "psychological analysis" includes this kind—mine, by the way, does not); he insists that the spectator respond in "pure subjectivities." Fine—but he might have bethought himself that people are uncomfortable when baffled (certainly the audiences were with whom I saw the film). People fear the incomprehensible, and fear was the only subjectivity the film drew out. The authors asked too much—the audience

[1] *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad.* Director: Alain Resnais. Scenario and dialogue: Alain Robbe-Grillet. Director of Photography: Sacha Vierny. Music: Francis Seyrig. *A* = Delphine Seyrig. *X* = Giorgio Albertazzi. *M* = Sacha Pitoeff. Happily, Robbe-Grillet's screenplay has been published (Grove Press, $1.95); otherwise it would be impossible to remember the order of scenes. The author's introductory essay helps a great deal.

[2] *Esquire,* June, 1962. *Show,* May, 1962.

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gave too little; in either case, the critical task becomes, not judgment but mediation, explication.

Clearly, the film has something to do with possibilities, and some of the brethren have claimed that that is the whole point of the film, "reality as an infinite series of possibities." But isn't reality rather an infinitely decreasing series of possibilities? I believe the Second Law of Thermodynamics said something of the sort, at least until C. P. Snow made a culture of it. And anyway, this film has nothing to do with reality in any usual sense: the corridors of Nymphenburg are hardly life as she is lived. Nor are the possibilities in *Marienbad* very possible. In life, things are either one way or the other; here, they are both. The people cast shadows, but the bushes don't; a violin plays, but we hear an organ, and so on. The style is not that of reality at all, but of dreams or the id:

> The laws of logic—above all, the law of contradiction—do not hold for processes in the id. Contradictory impulses exist side by side without neutralizing each other or drawing apart; at most they combine in compromise formations.... There is nothing in the id which can be compared to negation, and we are astonished to find in it an exception to the philosophers' assertion that space and time are necessary forms of our mental acts. In the id there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time.... Naturally, the id knows no values, no good and evil, no morality.

—so Freud in the *New Introductory Lectures,* and so *Marienbad.*

The whole point about possibilities in *Marienbad* is that they are all there, frozen as it were, and this quality comes across in the formal, *haute couture* of the film, its acting which is not acting at all, but posing in the manner of fashion ads or the rotogravure—again, competing possibilities actualized. The atmosphere of the "resort-hotel" and its "park," the formal clothes the guests wear, the recurring performance of a play, the ritualized and prescribed life within the resort—these define a world in which all possibilities (whether known presently or not) have been marked out. The splendiferous baroque tracery of the ceilings and walls represents a style in which the decorator has actualized all the possibilities a given line has.

The key image is games and play. The shuffled deck, the dealt dominoes, the formal shooting-match contain in themselves all possible outcomes; nothing truly unpredictable can happen. In particular, of course, the film uses the so-called *Marienbad* game. Two players set out matches (cards, chips, dominoes, people) in four piles: 1, 3, 5, and 7. Playing alternately, each player can take as many matches as he likes from any one pile; the one who must take the last match "loses." This is, of course, nothing but the old mathematical diversion of Nim, the theory of which Professors Philip Franklin and Hartley Rogers have

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been kind enough to explain to me. The first step is to write (or imagine) the number of matches in each pile in numbers to the base two, arranging those binary numbers in a column for addition; thus, the *Marienbad* version,

becomes

1
11
101
111

To win the game, let the other man start; then remove matches in such a way that the number of units in each column after your move is either even or zero (but do not, near the end of the game, leave your opponent an even number of piles with one match in each). Because in the *Marienbad* version, the starting arrangement is a winning combination, the one who plays second (M, in the film) can always force a win; the one who plays first (M does this once) can force a win if his opponent doesn't know the system. Resnais and Robbe-Grillet are using the properties of this game much as Bergman used the two-dimensional properties of chess in *The Seventh Seal*.[3] The film pretends Nim is a true game in which either player could win; actually, once the piles are laid out, the game is as determined as tic-tac-toe—a perfect symbol for possibilities which are not true possibilities, choices which are not true choices.

I suspect that the form of the film, the logic of that quite incredible *mélange* of flashbacks, "objectivized hypotheses," and so on, derives from the series of choices involved in Nim: each match offers one of two choices, to take it or not to take it, limited by the rule that one can take only from one pile at a time, just as one possible event depends on the possibility of the sequence in which it is a part. Thus, 1. A and X had or had not met at Marienbad last year. 2. She agreed to go away with him; she insisted on waiting a year. 3. He did or did not take a photograph of her. 4. They did or did not have a daylight meeting in the park at which she lost the heel of her shoe. 5. X did or did not take her by force in her bedroom. 6. They did or did not have a night meeting in the park at which X, when M confronted the lovers, leaned on a faulty balustrade and fell. 7. M did or did not shoot A at an assignation in her bedroom. All these inconsistent possibilities (and some others) co-exist in the film, discoverable by the different clothes the characters wear for the different possible sequences. And the movement of the film is to reduce or foreclose these possibilities, just as Nim proceeds to its predetermined victory by reducing the number of matches and thus foreclosing possibilities of choice.

Just as X's games of Nim with M (*le mari peut-être*) inevitably end with X's taking the last match, so the film ends by X's leaving the hotel

[3] *Hudson Review*, XII (1959), 270.

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with the lady. As they leave, the screen goes to black; the voice of X says:

> The park of this hotel was a kind of garden *à la francaise* without any trees or flowers, without any foliage.... Gravel, stone, marble and straight lines marked out rigid spaces, surfaces without mystery. It seemed, at first glance, impossible to get lost here ... at first glance ... down straight paths, between the statues with frozen gestures and granite slabs, where you were now already getting lost, forever, in the calm night, alone with me.

In short, they have left the world of the unconscious (as described by Freud), where there is no negative, no sense of time, for a world where one can "get lost." It is in this sense that the film is a portrayal of a proposition about mental life, in Robbe-Grillet's terms, "an attempt to construct a purely mental time and space—those of dreams, perhaps, or of memory, those of any affective life—without worrying too much about the traditional relations of cause and effect, or about an absolute time sequence in the narrative." "He offers her the impossible, what seems most impossible in this labyrinth where time is apparently abolished: he offers her a past, a future and freedom." Indeed, in psychological terms, by accepting a past one has denied (the repressed), one does achieve freedom. By accepting time, specifically the fact that time forecloses possibilities, eliminates freedom, paradoxically, one achieves freedom; one escapes the determinism of the unconscious; A can "get lost."

This explication is not inconsistent with some ingenuities suggested by others, for example, that A is mad, X a psychiatrist, and M her madness; that X is Death, A the Maiden, M a frozen immortality; that X is Prince Charming, A the Sleeping Beauty, and M the Wicked Witch (or Warlock)—all these are aspects or possibilities to what seems to me the informing principle of the film: Acceptance of the past (the repressed or a time-sense) represents release from the inexorable pleasure-principle (the imprisoning resort-hotel) of the id toward the world of decision, the ego. The film is a portrayal of Freud's description of the id, not the id itself—and lest you think I am splitting neurons, remember that a portrayal of the id itself would, in any case, be impossible. The analogy is to metatheatre, to allegory and the psychomachia, to Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* or Dante's of Aquinas. Still closer is *The Sound and the Fury,* where, as my colleague Carvel Collins pointed out long ago, Benjy represents the id, Quentin the ego, Jason the superego, partly realistically, but also simply as portrayals of these mythical beasts as described in Freud's 1926 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article. Metafilm, like metatheatre, drops out the realism so that it can only be understood Aesopianly, as the portrayal of a proposition about mental life, not mental life as we experience it.

An explication along these lines may (or may not) ease the baffle-

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ment; it certainly will not answer the judgment that the film is cold because the film certainly is cold. Is that necessarily bad? *Godot,* it seems to me, is undeniably a masterpiece, but it scarcely throbs with the affective life of its characters. Beckett, Ionesco, and the rest of the metatheatre mob are playing against our emotional expectations as much as they are playing against our expectation of realism. They ask that we respond intellectually and with laughter; do they ask for more than the merest smudge of emotion? Repeatedly, Robbe-Grillet seems to suggest in his account of the collaboration that he wanted a film addressed exclusively to the senses. I would add (with Macdonald) that the film is directed to the intellect as well, but one thing is clear: the film is simply not aimed at the emotions. What little feeling the film arouses is curiously isolated, scarcely above the level of sensuous response. Just as the intellectual *donnée* is the separation of ego from id, so our emotional response is not at all tied in to the intellectual response. Is that bad? The "tragedies" of Chekhov and Strindberg call, not for the traditional emotions of tragedy, but for a mocking pity, mostly comic, an emotional response so special that half a century later the ordinary producer is too cautious to play for it. In the same way, metatheatre and metafilm (which, I suppose, constitute a metagenre) define themselves in terms of this special *affektlos,* sensuous-intellectual response they call for. Is such a demand bad? Not to me—and I will stick out my cerebrum and call *Marienbad* a metamasterpiece.

A further point in the film's favor: *Marienbad* is *pur;* it could not be anything but a film—not even a New Novel in the style of *The Voyeur* (the camera demands an omniscient point of view). Hollywood, unfortunately, has come to prefer the impure or un-film: the meticulous redaction of a proven competitor to television (be it Broadway or best-seller). To some extent, of course, Hollywood has always drawn on the novel and often with consummate success *(Sierra Madre, No Down Payment,* and so on). But within the last four or five years, this kind of safe-A film has almost blotted out the B's and C's and X's that worked from less successful (therefore, less fulfilled and exhausted) novels and treated them more cinematically. It used to be idle—or scholarly—to compare films to the novels from which they were taken; now, one can scarcely avoid it. The index to the change is the difference between Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956) or *Paths of Glory* (1957) and his *Lolita* (1962).[4] The earlier films were real films; *Lolita* is in the current style of the un-film.

The only truly cinematic effect I noticed was a cut from somebody's face to a face in a horror movie at a drive-in, a cut so drastic I cannot even remember what face Kubrick cut from. In the absence of cinema, such details as Charlie at the girls' camp or Dolly's husband's hearing-aid are dutifully lugged over from the novel; they make a *film à clef*

[4] *Lolita.* Director: Stanley Kubrick. Screenplay: Vladimir Nabokov. "Presented by" M-G-M.

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for those who are "in" on the novel, but never become part of the film as such, and this, despite the fact that Nabokov himself did the script.

My respect for Nabokov makes me doubt my own judgement, but even so, it seems to me he tore down a richly redolent roadside diner to put up a Howard Johnson's. Lolita herself is putsched rather farther along the straits of puberty than her fictional counterpart. James Mason finely conveys the shyness and reticence of a cultured European (he reads "Ulalume") confronted with the barbaric yawp of American motel culture; but he projects no more passion for his erstwhile nymphet than a ping-pong paddle.

The novel seemed to me somewhat blurred in conception; the film has done nothing to clarify matters. As before, I got the feeling of some kind of dualism (Lo-Lo, Humbert Humbert, Humbert-Quilty, Europe-America) and there are double-entendres aplenty: Camp Climax for Girls, the lecherous town of Ramsdale, Charlotte's promise to Humbert (as he looks at Lolita) to make him "cherry pies"; her attempt to seduce him with "a magnificent spread." All that the film adds is the notion (new, I think) that Quilty has a sort of Oriental intelligence, so that maybe now it is not just Europe-confronts-America, but a Kiplingesque East-meets-West. Or is the film dealing with a sort of *Through the Looking-Glass* learning of the local folkways, the curious captivities in American freedom? I don't know, and probably I shouldn't ask.

The strength of the novel was its deft, swift satire of Americana, and this Nabokov and Kubrick do translate—no mean trick in film, where the slight exaggeration into satirical absurdity, when rendered forty feet across, can easily become too broad. Shelley Winters, voice too loud, clothes too bright, breasts too heavy, is a delight as Lo-Lo's Astartic and predatory Mom; her remorseful communion with the ashes of her first makes a moment of high and splendid pathos. Surprisingly, Sue Lyon herself, as the nymph, comes across with a gratifyingly oral performance of that greedy little vulgarian. Diana Decker and Jerry Stovin do equally adept turns as Charlotte's friends. And Sellers' bravura shifts in identity (all impeccably stars-and-stripesy) are sheer *tour de force*. There are a few delightful bits, Lolita eating potato chips no-hands; a grandmotherly type in a plastic raincoat flitting over a fatal accident with a candid camera. But alas! in the nature of the case, most of what made the novel fun cannot be translated into film: Nabokov's sleight-of-pen and his lovingly physiological descriptions of Humbert's little ecstasies. Those made the novel a best-seller and therefore a movie—but, of course, they cannot be put in a movie. And this is the sorry and inevitable outcome in the game of the un-film.

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HILTON KRAMER

Art Chronicle

AMERICAN ART HAS A HISTORY, but does it have any meaningful continuity? This question, which haunts the whole development of American art like a spectre, becomes especially acute in dealing with the rise of modernism, and it takes on an almost shattering, mocking power in confronting the work of artists who came of age—as men, if not as artists—in the thirties. It was in that decade, when so much in our cultural life was shifting its basis from personal vision and private predicaments to a more communal and socially oriented outlook, that modernism became for the American painter and sculptor less an individual option and more a community possibility. The establishment of the Museum of Modern Art, the founding of the American Abstract Artists, the return of expatriate artists from France and Germany and the arrival of refugee teachers and dealers, the growing number of exhibitions and publications devoted to the great European modernists —these are not usually considered the pivotal events of the Depression years, but looking back now from the vantage point of the sixties they have turned out to be the starting place of almost everything that is still interesting in the art of the last three decades. From the time of the Armory Show and the pioneering exhibitions of Stieglitz, the main contours of the European achievement were known and had their influence; magazines like *The Dial* and *Broom* made European (and not only French) modernism a major concern in the twenties, and critics like Paul Rosenfeld and Henry McBride wrote intelligently about both European developments and American art in relation to them. But the assumption remained that there was a fundamental fissure separating the idea of modernism from American experience, and as a consequence a great deal of the art that was designed to catch up on European developments remained eccentric, self-willed, and fundamentally alien to the experience of the men who produced it.

It was in the thirties that a wholly new basis was laid for a modernist art that was more deeply committed to American experience. The pressure of history, which in the early thirties had isolated modern art in Paris, had, by the end of the thirties and the beginning of the war, shifted the center of the modern movement to New York. The ethos of the Federal Arts Project, in which nearly every artist of the period participated at one time or another, combined with the accelerating presence of modern pictures and the general political atmosphere to produce a situation in which the rebellion and innovation of modernist forms could be identified, virtually for the first time in American life, with a large-scale rejection of middle-class values and philistine insti-

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tutions. The politics of the thirties gave American modernism a revolutionary élan that no purely artistic idea had ever been able to stimulate. For many artists of the period, a commitment to modernism went hand in hand with their rejection of the capitalist institutions that lay in a shambles all around them. It was really the first time that anything like the alliance of social rebellion and artistic innovation, which in Europe had generated the Expressionist, Dadaist, Constructivist, and Futurist movements, came forward to set the terms for an American art.

What modernist art we have had since the thirties derives from this source, yet the history of American art in the last thirty years has nonetheless remained as fragmentary and discontinuous, as much a matter of bold starts and bright ideas, of dissipated passions and personal predicaments, as ever before. Though the historians of Abstract Expressionism are now in the habit of assuming just the contrary, the fact is that no powerful and socially coherent idea of art emerged from the tumultuous changes of the thirties. American artists received a notable education in the possibilities of art, but the few who have been able to produce a consistent body of work, work that may still be distinguished by a continuity of vision superseding all changes of style or method, have done so as isolated individuals.

Abstract Expressionism came out of the war years of the forties when the energies and ideas of the thirties were turned to other purposes. An impulse that derived from a sense of community enterprise was now focused entirely on the preoccupations of the self adrift in its own consciousness. What remained of the thirties ideology was the Marxian sense of history now perversely transmuted into an aesthetic teleology that could only be realized by the individual artist pressing some tiny fragment of inherited style—which is to say, some fragment of his education and disappointed hope—to the brink of dissolution and thereby vindicating his separate identity as a creative force. The crucial shift was from an impulse more or less socialist in spirit to one that fell back on the resources of the self with an existential dolor and intensity. The war dissipated not only the optimism of the thirties but any usable sense of connection with society at large. The presence in New York during the war of a large number of refugee European modernists (Léger, Miró, Mondrian, Lipchitz, Ernst, Breton and others), themselves cut off from their native milieux and abstracted from everything but their styles and careers, created a synthetic art-centered culture that isolated many American artists from the social expectations of the thirties, forcing each man to become the lonely agent of his own development. Many of the artists who started out in the thirties feeling they were on the side of history discovered in the forties that it was enough, if it was not indeed preferable, to be on the side of art history even if that seemed to be leading them into an ever narrower corridor of the mind.

It is against this background of hope and withdrawal, of large pos-

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sibilities exchanged for small solutions, that many of the careers now dominating American art must be seen. It is this background that makes these careers so radically discontinuous with themselves, so alienated by disavowals and sudden conversions from their own past. Never before have so many artists been forced to live imprisoned in the present tense of their own reputations. A few years ago, when the art journal I was then editing made a routine request for a photograph of a PWA mural executed in the thirties by an artist just emerging in the fifties as a votary of the new abstraction, the response we received was an hysterical charge of McCarthyism and the threat of legal action. But far from attempting any critical exposé of the past, the article in question was a memoir written by an innocent fellow artist who had himself turned to abstraction and who had not dreamed that his mellow evocation of the good old days would cause such terrified anxiety. A similar anxiety governed the exhibitions of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko at the Museum of Modern Art a few years ago, and will undoubtedly make itself felt again in the forthcoming show of Mark Tobey at the same institution. We are shown artists without beginnings, artists who, though of an age when they might be expected to have come into full imaginative possession of their own experience, bend every effort toward creating some wholly new identity.

If this anxious and self-denying attitude toward the past—and particularly toward the thirties—shows at last some sign of changing, the principal agency of that change is the force that now governs all major aesthetic developments in American art: the momentum of the art market. The London agent representing the Pollock estate has found it possible to market the utterly undistinguished work which that artist produced in the thirties, and some enterprising dealers in New York have rounded up odds and ends from the early work of Franz Kline, Rothko, and others. There is, it seems, a market now for this work which nobody takes very seriously as art. (Collectors who favor representational styles and historical curiosities and who yet cannot resist the glamour of a new international reputation would seem to be the logical buyers of such work.) But until last spring no museum had attempted to act upon this change of attitude in any serious way. The great interest generated by the exhibition called "Continuity and Change," consisting of one hundred and seventy-one works by forty-five painters and sculptors at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, lay precisely in its fresh confrontation of this buried past. Here was an exhibition that promised explicitly to reestablish the sense of continuity that had been so conspicuously lacking in our conscious dealing with new art, and I think the generous response accorded the exhibition—my impression is that a larger number of artists, dealers, and their associates made the trip from New York to Hartford than is usually the case with such events—grew out of an eagerness to renegotiate some connection with the thirties in a way that would bring the

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art of that period back into public view and yet not have it act as a criticism of the present scene.

The general tone of the exhibition, the relaxed and random nature of its selection, must have assured even the most anxious visitor that this was not an event which threatened to make any hard and fast discriminations. The miscellaneous character imposed on the exhibition by Mr. Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., the Curator of the Atheneum who organized it, was the reverse of a critical attitude, and it was no doubt this air of openness and tolerance, promising at every turn that anything might be seen and nothing judged, that accounted for the happy spirit in which the show was received.

But of course every meaningful contact with the past *does* act as a criticism of the present whether it is designed for that purpose or not. One could scarcely cast a glance at a painting like Rothko's *Two Women in Window* (c. 1936) without wondering how much of his late style was born of a radical deficiency of sensibility and ineptness in the elementary practices of his craft. Rothko was in his thirties when he did this painting, yet it has the look of some juvenilia executed by a not very gifted art student who had looked too long at the work of Milton Avery without understanding it. Avery himself, represented in the Hartford exhibition by five paintings, is one of the few American artists whose development really rewards this kind of scrutiny. Nothing like the full majesty and lyricism of his vision can be gleaned in so few works, but the lineaments of an exquisite visual intelligence, at once modest and decisive, able to draw out of observation precisely those elements that will best represent his witty and affecting grasp of experience, are nonetheless visible. The point about this juxtaposition of Avery and Rothko, however, lies less in the fact that one has achieved a mastery where the other clearly has not than in the terms by which mastery is attempted. Both painters are notable for the degree to which they have placed the main expressive burden of their art on intense, close-valued color allied to large, simplified forms—a mode of expression that originates in Matisse. But where Avery has enlarged and purified his style by refining his observation of nature and transmuting his visual sensations to a point where they are virtually inseparable from his painting craft. Rothko remained expressively helpless until the restricted, art-centered values of the forties relieved him of the obligation to deal candidly with his own visual experience and released that flair for generalized chromatic rhetoric that has characterized his painting ever since.

In general, the older artists represented in the Hartford exhibition quickly divide themselves into those few who, like Avery, demonstrate some artistic continuity and those who, like Rothko, only begin to function when the terms and expectations of art have been radically narrowed. In the first group are, besides Avery, the sculptors Nakian, Nevelson, Noguchi, and Smith, and two painters, Albers and Pousette-

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Dart. Of these, the presiding master is David Smith, who, virtually alone among artists of his generation (he was born in 1906), has produced an *oeuvre* traversing three decades that is absolutely consistent in syntax, invention, and general aims. When one examines the way Mr. Wagstaff has chosen to represent Smith in this exhibition, one begins to suspect that some deeper equivocation lay behind the haphazard character of his selections as a whole. Of the five items included, one consists of two medals, produced for a national art competition, of no artistic consequence whatever, and another of a monolithic steel *Torso* (reproduced in the catalogue) that represents nothing but a footnote to Smith's copious achievement. In the presence of a body of work that could boast an overriding unity of concept and realization, Mr. Wagstaff chose precisely those works that would make Smith's development appear as fragmentary and aimless as most of the other artists in the show. This not only demonstrates that incurable museological tendency to sacrifice the truth of art to a showy idea, but the exact nature of the idea: that it is somehow natural and inevitable for an artist's development to consist of discontinuous bits and pieces; that his "real" progress takes place somehow or other in a realm not readily discernible in concrete visual terms. In a foreword to the catalogue Mr. Wagstaff writes: "Shape, or form, seems to be the ultimate unit of personal style, though [*sic*?] there is a rhythm radical to much of each artist's *oeuvre* from the earliest beginnings to the present. Whether these binding principles are called 'handwriting,' 'personality,' or 'essential bias,' the similarities between one period and another at times appear to outweigh the differences." At times perhaps, but seldom in the exhibition Mr. Wagstaff has put together, and since it is now left to words to create the smooth, logical careers that artists themselves have failed to manage, he papers over the gaps by grandly referring to "enormous Kierkegaardian jumps forward."

Actually, it is not clear that Mr. Wagstaff really grasps the shape of those few careers that lend themselves to the kind of exposition he has attempted. Nakian's gift for a delicate and precious eroticism, lately so painfully overwhelmed by his Miltonic ambition for a grand rhetorical style but still the central interest of his sculpture, comes off rather blurred. And one wonders why artists like Alexander Calder and Stuart Davis, whose careers, like those of Smith and Avery, really are carried forward by an abiding commitment to syntax and vision—that is, by fidelity to a principle of structure and imagery that embodies their whole view of experience—rather than by the vagaries of "personality" or "essential bias," are not represented at all. When one notes, finally, that many of the artists in the Hartford show, though interesting in themselves, are not old enough to have achieved either the "continuity" or "change" that the exhibition purports to clarify, but are merely the names most conspicuously in evidence from last season's publicity mill, Mr. Wagstaff's ability to carry through a coherent idea

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to its conclusion is compromised beyond repair. Perhaps because his own grasp of the period he is dealing with is so fragmentary and inconsecutive, so utterly contingent upon the caprice of fashion and publicity, he is much more at home with those artists whose histories have been governed by similar interests.

One of the painters included in Mr. Wagstaff's exhibition, where he was represented by three works, was Philip Guston, who at the same time was given a large retrospective show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. This consisted of ninety-eight paintings and thirty-one drawings, and thus gave one the opportunity to explore in depth—or at least on an enlarged scale—the question posed in Hartford. Born in 1913, Guston has followed a course in many ways typical of the painters of his generation who were not directly affiliated with the changes taking place in New York painting during the war years but whose later work, about 1950 onward, is entirely absorbed in an attempt to catch up with its changed values and momentum. In the thirties he traveled in Mexico and worked on government mural projects in California and New York. In the early forties he taught in mid-Western universities and began showing in New York, and in the late forties traveled in Europe. In 1951 he moved to New York, and it was then that his painting acquired some of the characteristics of the New York School.

From 1941 to 1947 Guston's painting consisted very largely of sentimental allegories based on mural themes from the preceding decade; it was still vaguely oriented toward social motifs but now deprived of political motivation and given over to a sickly bathos which sympathetic commentators like to call "poetry." Many painters of the period followed a similar course without ever committing themselves conceptually to a modernist idiom; they were "modern" by virtue of graphic distortions in drawing, and they exchanged social themes for allegory and symbolism, but their art remained fundamentally unchanged—and for the most part, banal. (Ben Shahn is the most famous case, I suppose.) But Guston did make a fundamental break with his past. In the early fifties, having eliminated all figurative elements from his canvas and limiting himself to a flat, two-dimensional image, he began painting in a quasi-Impressionist manner that was clearly related to the Abstract Expressionism then going strong in New York but which seemed intent upon preserving and even celebrating some vestige of delicacy and nuance in the face of the bold and violent gestures that were dominating the work of his friends. Yet Guston was never able to make of this shimmering personal delicacy, so painfully deliberated and so finical in execution, more than a manner. Only by insulating it from serious comparisons—with Mondrian in strength of format, with Bonnard and Monet in the matter of sensation meticulously orchestrated for some large expressive purpose—could one sustain an interest in a style that was obviously floundering for something outside itself, for some image, subject, or idea to which it might attach itself and be saved. Guston

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tried to make of his delicate manner a vessel large enough to contain all the interests of his sensibility, and in the process has only succeeded in bringing his painting to an impasse of vulgarity and exhaustion. The most recent paintings in the Guggenheim show, with their shapeless masses of paint and their hide-and-seek flirting with subjects, are among the most repellent works on the current scene.

There have been artists in the past, of course, who arrived late in life at some definitive new vision after a career of failure—artists who consummated a startling new departure after all hope of such an effort seemed gone. The most famous modern example is the Spanish sculptor Gonzalez, who was well into his fifties before he produced the open-space metal sculpture that changed the course of the medium. But one notes two salient facts about the late flowering of Gonzalez's talent that do not seem to be present in the effort of many American artists to achieve a similar rebirth. He did not accomplish it alone. It was in collaboration with his countryman Picasso that he effected his final achievement. And he did not disavow his beginnings, but on the contrary, was able under Picasso's guidance to draw upon a lifetime of experience in metalcraft in his last effort to create an enduring expression. It is not the history of their failures that make the careers of so many American artists a dismal spectacle but their constant striving to be something other than themselves.

Notes on Contributors

VERNON WATKINS is the noted British poet. *Affinities,* a new book of his poems, is to be published in the late fall.

IRVING HOWE's book on William Faulkner has recently been reissued in revised form. The present essay was prepared as an Introduction to an edition of Lawrence's letters.

H. W. BLATTNER lives in San Francisco. This is her first published story.

HILTON KRAMER is a former editor of *Arts* Magazine, and has contributed to numerous publications. He has been appointed to the art faculty of Bennington College for the 1962-63 academic year.

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS is the author of the recently published *Surface and Symbol,* a study of *Ulysses* (Oxford). He has spent the past summer in Mexico.

MARIUS BEWLEY is the author of two books on American literature, *A Complex Fate* and *The Eccentric Design.*

PATRICK CRUTTWELL is Professor of English at the University, Exeter, England. He is the author of *The Shakespearean Moment,* and of two novels: *A Kind of Fighting* and *A Matter of Succession.*

JOHN SIMON's reports on the current New York theater will be resumed in the next issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW.

Translations from the Swedish poet, Gunnar Ekelöf, by ROBERT BLY and Christina Bratt, will appear in the Winter issue of this Review.

ROGER SALE will join the English Department at the University of Washington this fall.

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Fiction Chronicle[1]

THE POINT OF FICTION CHRONICLE, this lynchpin of our democracy, is not the generalizations to which it gives rise (the sampling being, inescapably, random), but the sacred particulars. Still, one is led necessarily to extrapolate on the record of the novel, even if only from a three-month sampling, and the resulting generalities might as well come first, to be applied or discarded, as seems appropriate.

1. The American novel is more lively and inventive, linguistically, than the English novel; it is also structurally more invertebrate. In its use of language, the South (though starting to repeat itself) is still the most generous and exuberant section of the country.
2. The American academy (college or university) obsesses the American writer, as a scene, as a theme, as an atmosphere. It is never defined to include departments of physics, geology, classics, or micropaleontology—only departments of language and literature It is invariably an object of contempt or loathing.
3. The stream of radical innovation and experiment, in the form of extreme discontinuities and interiorizations, continues to flow; but the bold experiment of today is not much different than it was twenty or thirty years ago, deriving essentially from Joyce via France.

The root of these judgments may be defined as one prepossession: the novel has an excuse for being these days, only so far as it approaches the condition of poetry. The machinery of mimetic fantasy is tiresome unless it carries the reward of compression and insight.

Though it conforms, in its own right, to no general rule whatever, Mr. Nabokov's venture into academic Grand Guignol, *Pale Fire,* illustrates palely all three of my preliminary axioms. Its protagonist is a perfectly charming professor, whom one recognizes as a phantom of

[1] PALE FIRE, by *Vladimir Nabokov.* Putnam's. $5.00. THE REIVERS, by *William Faulkner.* Random House. $4.95. AN UNOFFICIAL ROSE, by *Iris Murdoch.* Viking. $4.95. BORDER COUNTRY, by *Raymond Williams.* Horizon Press. $4.50. A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE, by *Reynolds Price.* Atheneum. $3.95. LETTING GO, by *Philip Roth.* Random House. $5.95. RIVERSIDE DRIVE, by *Louis Simpson.* Atheneum. $5.00. CONCRETIONS, by *Arlene Zekowski.* George Wittenborn. $5.00. THE DIALOGUES, by *Stanley Berne.* George Wittenborn. $5.00. THE SOFT MACHINE, by *William Burroughs.* Olympia Press. N.F. 15. THE MARQUISE WENT OUT AT FIVE, by *Claude Mauriac.* George Braziller. $4.95.

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long standing within that snorting, restive imagination. Pedant and pederast, suspicious and obsequious, sadistic and resentful (puffy, poisonous, and complacent), insanely witty, grossly egomaniacal, forever snared in the nooses of five different languages—what novelist would dare venture on such a hero as this, except our dear Vladimir Vladimirovitch? Who, save this rococo gambler, would try to tell the story of an international political assassination in a set of lunatic footnotes to an atrocious poem in monstrous heroic couplets? Who else could be convulsively funny in an index? Trickery on this outrageous scale is, fortunately, rare in the novel; otherwise our responses would be debauched in half a season. But the master at the top of his form is an experience not to be missed; and *Pale Fire* will enjoy a *succés d'estime* to contrast with *Lolita's succés de scandale.*

Like *Lolita, Pale Fire* is a flawed poem about a flawed and perverse love for an impossible princess, the English language; the essential experience is that of mental alienation. Not to put too fine a point on it, our narrator is looney, and his narration pure moonshine. Indeed, who knows better than the author that his narrator's fable, stripped of its hocuspocus, is a bit of claptrap on the order of *The Prisoner of Zenda* —why, in fact, is Ruritania named Zembla, if it is not a mere zemblance? (See p. 265.) The victim of the assassination is Professor Shade, the assassins are Shadows, the murderer himself is nothing but the process of his approach—Gradus, Degré, De Grey, d'Argus (of the hundred eyes)—however the word-wrung mind of mad Dr. Kinbote wishes to denominate him. Wordsmith University on Lake Omega, where many of the events take place, is obviously a fruit of the wildest and most unrestrained myth-making. The reality of *Pale Fire* is implosive; Dr. Kinbote, the narrator, is not only master of ceremonies, stage and landscape, but full cast of characters as well. The book's essential action is a witches' sabbath of European words within a ruined mind within a meager, complacent community. Kinbote is king and king-killer; indeed, his name designates, in Scots, the sum paid by a homicide to his victim's relatives. Thus killing the king of seem produces a professor. The marvellously mobile and unpredictably angled mind of Kinbote makes him, by turns, monarch and outcast, visionary and buffoon, saint and satyr. Not since *A Tale of a Tub* have such lively games been played with the masks of scholarship, and the insanities or ineptitudes which underlie them.

Disinherited and perverse, the mind of Dr. Kinbote is a vaudeville laced with malice; its predestined victim, the reader. Among the words which will send this happy victim to his unabridged are such delicate darlings as woodwose, izba, goetic, nenuphar, inenubilable, and kikapoo—not to mention cosmopolites like *travestissement* and Boscobel. Pursuit of more impressive but still minor points rarely fails to be rewarding; the sort of detail which Kinbote drops in a lordly aside (for example, the debt of *Finnegans Wake* to Southey's Lingo-Grande)

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would furnish a more pedestrian mind with matter for an article. But even on its slippery surface, the texture of the book is jewelled and dangerous. Puns and anagrams in languages both real and imaginary make up a gridwork of sliding and subtle confusions; rich and rewarding patterns of booby-traps and deliberate errors dapple the surface of a glittering and specious prose. Yet every now and then the sly, teasing indirection of these assaults on the reader's equilibrium gives way to a booming frontal attack. The sexual history of Gradus, for example, is compressed into a little diamond of absurd poetry, as disgusting as a cigarette butt in an unflushed urinal:

> Sexual impulses had greatly bothered him at one time but that was over. After his wife, a beader in Radugovitra, had left him (with a gypsy lover), he had lived in sin with his mother-in-law until she was removed, blind and dropsical, to an asylum for decayed widows. Since then he had tried several times to castrate himself, had been laid up at the Glassman Hospital with a severe infection, and now, at forty-four, was quite cured of the lust that Nature, that grand cheat, puts into us to inveigle us into propagation.

There are, I suppose, readers who won't get the pastoral quality of this delicate drollery, with its transparent assurance and its florid, pseudo-philosophical flourish at the end. But for those who find the passage irresistibly funny, the rest of Nabokov's new poison-garden can be securely recommended as a landscape for leisurely botanizing. (Radugovitra is an imaginary town which combines in its name the Russian word for "rainbow" and the French one for "stained glass"; glassmaking and mirrorlooking are the natural occupations of Zemblans, and Gradus the obsessed assassin of the obsessed Kinbote, had been a glazier by trade. "Magic casements [these], opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.")

As the drama of *Pale Fire* is largely interior and fantastic, the book depends hardly at all on that *odium academicum,* the prolonged spite of nice men, which is so frequent in academic novels. Its aesthetic purity is guaranteed by its hauteur. Not that the book takes seriously anything on the campus. In addition to the follies of Kinbote the editor, translator, and insufferable literary snoop, the ungainly manners of Gothic America are given full treatment. From the heavy raillery of the faculty club to the glacial formalities of the drawing room, Nabokov has registered the mores of New Wye with civilized acidity. The pale blue fire of his wit neither spares nor lingers over its victims. It is a surpassingly busy book, devoted to the gentle arts of balance, elusion, leverage, cross-purpose and shock. There will, very likely, be readers who find the whole pastime more demanding than rewarding; and I'm far from suggesting that the book has hidden inner meanings which will fall open at the application of a key. That would make it altogether too easy to sit down in the complacent possession of an

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allegorical pattern. In fact, Nabokov works, like Kafka, with interior surfaces; the puzzles which he sets must be accepted for their own sakes. His world consists of flats, facades, transparencies; as for the moral and humane dimensions—"profundities," compassions, inner developments—it simply does not have them. Nabokov takes the reader, not for an initiate or an accomplice, but for an antagonist. His vaudeville, like Swift's, is predicated on distaste for those greasy commonplaces, flesh and blood; and "Timon of Athens" presides over the novel, suggesting not only Nabokov's title, but one of his premises.

In the weird landscape populated by exotic Fleur de Fyler (defiler of flowers), two Soviet assistants named Andronnikov and Niagarin, and aristocratic Harfar Baron of Shalksbore, alias Curdy Buff *(coeur de boeuf?),* the pursuit of galloping vocables quite properly usurps upon the formulation of "meanings." The reader who understands how things work will be able to forego for some time (perhaps permanently?) the question of what they represent. But one hint for his guidance might be offered, in the book's pervasive fascination with mirrors, glassware, and reflections, hence with the contrast between fantasy and explanation. The Sudarg of Bokay, a mirror-image of the name Jakob Gradus, is defined as a mirror-maker of genius, whose chef d'oeuvre used to stand in the bedroom of Charles the Beloved; Gradus himself is in some sense a mirror-image of left-handed, homosexual Kinbote, who sometimes refers to himself as Botnik, and who shines (with pale fire, naturally) in the reflected glitter of Professor Shade. As the Bard says,

> The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
> Robs the vast sea: the moon's an arrant thief,
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun:
> The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
> The moon into salt tears: the earth's a thief,
> That feeds and breeds by a composture stol'n
> From general excrement: each thing's a thief.

The fragile perversity of these crazed and broken mirrors may bother the stolid; but it is the essence of Nabokov's astonishing talent to wander in the half-world of semi-people, against whom he uses the glittering tangularities of many languages. He is a fish perpetually and magnificently out of water; long may he wave.

Mr. Faulkner's new novel, *The Reivers,* is also funny; but it doesn't make quite the same sorts of demands on the reader as *Pale Fire.* Indeed, the plot is so loaded with improving clichés that one is almost inclined to write off the whole thing as a folksy entertainment, of the type fondly remembered by old *Saturday Evening Post* devotees. The central episode involves a simple, shrewd black rascal who knows, in his primitive folk wisdom, the secret of making a simple, shrewd horse run specially fast. There are a couple of prostitutes with hearts of gold

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—scout's honor, there are—and the nicest one reforms and marries her earnest, simple-minded suitor, who beat up the leering, evil-minded sheriff; and we have the touch of tiny fingers at the end. Yes, indeed, their union is blessed with timely issue. And who is the precious bundle named after? Who but the narrator, Lucius Priest, who is very elderly indeed (almost senile, one gathers) when the narrating is done, but who was just eleven years old in 1905, when the events occurred. Lucius is a really good, wholesome boy. He touches Miss Corrie's heart by standing up for her manfully, so that she changes her evil ways on the spot, and gives him her solemn promise not to be bad any more—which, of course, she isn't. Miss Reba herself honors Lucius' devotion to his mother's precepts, for there's some good in even the worst of us. Besides, Lucius is racially virtuous; as a chivalric Southern gentleman, he knows one doesn't refer to any fellow creature by his race or religion (p. 143), and he even sleeps in the same room with a fine old colored gentleman just as if he. . . . Lucius does many mischievous things, but never a mean one, for he comes of good stock; and his grandfather gives him, when the whole thing is over, a truly heartfelt lecture on the code of the gentleman; so that it all comes out all right in the end. *The Reivers* is a corking (or, alternatively, rattling) good yarn, and should do right well on the silver screen. There is a bad boy in the book, with a very evil mind, who now and then says a word spelled "- - - t"; but this is about as close as *The Reivers* ever gets to saying something startling. The climax of the book comes when the same two horses race each other over the same course four times hand-running, but as something different happens each time, there is no danger of the reader's getting bored.

Mr. Faulkner has diverted himself, in a word, by writing a bit of hokum for hot summer reading; the *Sturm und Drang* days when he seemed to know and care about evil lie far in the past; and here, in the idyllic, homespun diversions of Boon Hogganbeck, Ned McCaslin, and Lucius Priest, we find him entering upon an early-Kipling phase—shades of Mulvaney, Llearoyd, and Ortheris—which somehow one hadn't anticipated.

A curious problem for students of Mr. Faulkner's prose style is the contrast between the early and late pages of this reminiscence. The narration of Lucius Priest begins in the most involuted, periphrastic, and unreasonably entangled Faulknerian prose (its pronominal references propped up with beanpole nouns, its verbs slewed by the scruff across whole pages, its suspensions acrobatic, its conjunctions nerve-wracking) ever penned. This style encourages topical digression, as by Mr. Bones and Mr. Interlocutor; and we have a number of extraneous excursions, concerning the retreat of the wilderness and the relative intelligence of animals—as well as topical references to Mrs. Roosevelt and the Citizens Council, Senator Goldwater and the A.D.A. Neither dialect is strictly dramatic, and the abrupt shift from ponderous,

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sesquipedalian ironist to awestruck kid was particularly hard for this reader to manage. Some outlines of characterization are hard to manage too. Boon Hogganbeck, hard-fisted, hard-drinking livery-stable hand in Jefferson, becomes abruptly naif and sentimental as soon as the caravan reaches Memphis; at the same instant, Ned McCaslin, giggling and shiftless as Stepin Fetchit during the journey, alters suddenly to a figure of steely purpose and immense philosophical dignity. "There's somewhere the Law stops and just people starts" Ned is capable of saying. The simple dignity of this noble aphorism strikes a sympathetic chord in the hearts of all onlookers—all rightminded onlookers, that is. The baddies just snarl.

The best things about *The Reivers* are its incidental details. On their way to Memphis, the pilgrims encounter a man who maintains a mudhole in the road, and makes a nice profit hauling cars out of it. He has a fine dry sense of laconic humor, alongside the practical moral sense of a man-eating shark; and there is good fun with him. Getting a stolen horse into an empty boxcar on a Memphis siding at midnight also turns out to involve some attractive horseplay; and Miss Reba, trying to impose exasperated decorum on the dinner conversation of her insubordinate whorehouse, is a genuine old-fashioned caution. But on the whole, Mr. Faulkner's humor is fuzzy and lovable compared with Mr. Nabokov's. Some of this fuzz rubs off on the diction, too. Faulkner flourishes polysyllables with a shaman's fervor, but there lingers about them a little blur of pretension mingled with carelessness. He will write, for instance, that "Mr. Binford's ghost still reigned, still adumbrated his callipygian grottoes" (p. 133). It's cute, of course, to call the rooms of a house on Catalpa Street "callipygian grottoes," though the adjective, with its narcissist overtones, doesn't apply very exactly either to the rooms or to the sort of lively frontier trade which Miss Reba drives in them. Finally, the primary sense of "adumbrate" is "foreshadow" or "typify," though it can mean, in a remote tertiary sense, "overshadow." But really the sense of the word isn't felt at all, in the passage proper, because the statement has already been made in "still reigned"; "adumbrated" is mere window-dressing. To be sure, it wasn't niceties of this order that made classics of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury;* but now that the gusts of cosmic violence have blown themselves out, the least rhetorical excess quickly makes itself felt.[2]

The virtues of Faulkner and Nabokov are very different, both as to quality and quantity, but most of them have to do with a handling of language, a vein of diction beyond the commonplace. Not so with Iris

[2] This review was written before Mr. Faulkner's recent death at Oxford, Mississippi. Without altering in any particular an already-formulated judgment of *The Reivers,* I wish to express a profound sense of loss in the death of the man who wrote *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury.* Though his work was strikingly uneven, at his best he will rank with Melville as a maker of American Gothic.

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Murdoch's *An Unofficial Rose,* which combines familiar ingredients of this author's fantasy—sadistic females, ineffectual males, a cats'-cradle of love-affairs—in a white sauce of stylistic anonymity. Wry comedy is the intended effect; and Miss Murdoch, as usual, is a brisk, crisp animator of paper-dolls, who keeps them shuffling about at an altogether improper clip. Her people are just not very interesting, as thinkers, as feelers, as talkers; and when we get out of the realm of deliberate burlesque, Miss Murdoch's point of view toward them gets so murky that one develops doubts whether she has full control of her materials. The sheep whom she leads to slaughter bleed to death so meekly—and so early in the novel—that one feels it rather incumbent on Miss Murdoch to tell us what all the rest of the shootin's fer. But this is just what she never, to this reader's satisfaction, does. The title of her present novel refers, evidently, to Randall, a full-scale rotter, by avocation a grower of roses, who is presumably to be thought a fine ironic flower sprung from the decayed compost-heap of the Home Counties. Randall undertakes to divorce his wife Ann, leave his daughter Miranda, give up his nursery, and do nothing for a while, at the cost of his bumbling old father's most prized possession, a Tintoretto. And in fact, after some typical masculine indecision, he does tool off to Italy with an aggressive young lady named, oddly, Lindsay Rimmer. All this is thoroughly unofficial behavior. But as everyone in the book is either fool, knave, or both; as life back on the rose-ranch was thoroughly corrupt and superficial; and as nobody talks as if he were anything but bored or confused, Randall's bounderish behavior does not stand out in very sharp outline. An elderly lady novelist is, apparently, supposed to be more knowing and perceptive than any of the other boobies in the book; but as she uses her brains chiefly to make others as miserable as herself, and does not speak any more entertainingly than they do, she does not do much to redeem the charade. Indeed, wherever the novel has a chance to blossom into living speech, it is damped or throttled into verbal drabness. This flat style, and some of the self-consciously coldblooded talk (perhaps illogically, it makes one think of Ayn Rand) deserve satiric comment at least as much as the follies which receive it. But Miss Murdoch has not left herself a platform from which to launch any such darts. There may be a sense or circumstance in which the proceedings of *An Unofficial Rose* would seem irresistibly funny across the water; but Miss Murdoch's bouquet evidently travels badly, for I didn't find the novel more than mildly and momentarily amusing.

Two slight studies of life back home offer interesting contrasts in English and American styles. A don at the University of London, with several sociological-type books to his credit, Raymond Williams has written in *Border Country* a fine early-Lawrence novel about Wales, integrity, and paternity. Quiet and undemanding, the book has not only a nostalgic poetry but simple, square strength. Like the Welsh

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workers whom it describes, it moves with plodding energy and great momentum. Nothing startling about the theme—bloke comes belatedly to terms with his past and enters into his manhood—and nothing unusual about the style, which is determinedly inarticulate when it isn't describing the vegetation. Indeed, the inarticulate Welsh remain obdurately inarticulate throughout this book. One does get to sense, somehow, the tough and gnarled substructure of matey character; but it doesn't often rise to phrases more memorable than "Don't trouble yourself" and "No bother at all." Behind these shambling gestures, one learns, pulse the dark loyalties of Mr. Williams' mute railway-signalmen; and after a time one comes to sense what it may be to rest in the bosom of an understanding that wants either no words at all or only the most common counters. Whether this can produce a rich and intricate fictional experience is another matter. The book has a good deal of freshness and charm of feeling; it has the analytic-exposition structure of a good Ibsen play; but it does not have much memorable language or distinct characterization.

Among the Americans, on the other hand, a young North Carolinian, a Rhodes scholar named Reynolds Price, has achieved in his first novel both a fine character and a distinctive mode of speech. The book is called *A Long and Happy Life,* and it describes the doings of a young lady named Miss Rosacoke Mustian. Miss Rosacoke is beautifully envisioned, without sentimentality or, it seems to me, cynicism; and she defines her simple, warm heart, as well as her simple, knotty mind, precisely by the flow of her speech. She has a serious problem in a hard young motorcyclist named Wesley Beavers and the randy-respectable double standard of smalltown tidewater North Carolina. But the weight of the past, under which Mr. Williams' Welshmen have solidified into laconic stoicism, rests lightly on Miss Rosacoke. She is a resilient and mobile young woman, common as dirt, but with resources of strength and gaiety in which we have to believe because of the metaphors which her tongue mounts as naturally as a jaybird. Altogether, the American book has a bolder, less tired way with language; its characters are more vital, more vulnerable. It is the American innocence, but a wary and hardened innocence, which suspends Miss Rosacoke before her reserved, ambiguous destiny, yet allows one to feel her world as a wedding. Mr. Price has a way of working into the mind and circumstance of a character which I think bespeaks the born writer of fiction; and which gives one the right—or even without the right, encourages one—to anticipate for him a really interesting future. The name is Reynolds Price. Watch for it.

Two academic novels, out of Chicago (by Philip Roth: *Letting Go*) and Columbia (by Louis Simpson: *Riverside Drive*) take different tacks with the business of the academy, yet succumb to the common curse of pedestrianism. Mr. Roth has the more interesting theme, a man's effort to disentangle himself from the web of personal demand; but he be-

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labors it unmercifully, loading us with flat details about flat characters far beyond our ability to respond to them. We learn that Libby Hertz had an abortion in Detroit, some time past; so back, inescapably, to Detroit we go, for every last sodden detail of the abortion. Though they are all teachers of literature (and, incidentally, of students), none of the characters betray any interest in humane letters, or, for that matter, in students; they are ashamed or contemptuous of their jobs, and so far as the life of the mind is concerned, might as well be shoe-salesmen. It is a grimy novel, full of hysteria repressed and unrepressed, with a few moments of power but far too many sad *longueurs,* where not even the momentum of breakdown suffices to animate the bleak midwestern landscape.

Unlike Mr. Roth, Louis Simpson has made education the central concern of his novel, *Riverside Drive.* The chief agent of Duncan Bell's education is one of those Riverside-Drive girls who were the topic of folklore even in this elderly codger's long-gone days on Morningside Heights. (Cognoscenti will recognize the best of these myths from its punchline: "Oh, Roger, I bet you think I'm just terrible!") Mona, in short, is one of those girls who can't say no; and Duncan is a wandering, susceptible beanbag, who can't forget her. There are all sorts of ways to tell this perennial story, most of them good; but over any of them I think one would like to feel a firm controlling hand—the sort of thing which, when we read the *Sentimental Education,* gives us continually to wonder how many ironic quotation marks should be placed around "Sentimental," how many around "Education." Mr. Simpson's hand isn't firm; it doesn't adequately control. His hero is addicted to literary references; he can't approach a battlefield without summoning up Fabrizio at Waterloo, his relation with Mona elicits talk of Manon and Des Grieux, and at what purports to be the height of an erotic scene, he regales us with the fore-ordained tag from *Phèdre.* One would like to feel that the purpose here is satiric; but Mr. Simpson hasn't earned his own exemption from the satire. Indeed, there are moments when his novel descends to its own list of *idées reçues.* There is a folksy Jewish grandmother, for example, badly out of place and quite functionless; there are moments of ungainly, off-balance earnestness, very hard to take.

For all this, one must add that Mr. Simpson displays from time to time a poet's gift for the compelling detail, and at his best a rage of caricature which makes the concluding pages of his novel more memorable than the early ones. I found the war experiences perfunctory, the education embarrassing, but the assaults upon upper bohemia altogether charming. Cold steel is evidently Mr. Simpson's metier, rather than sentiment; but he must learn to keep up his guard and shorten his lunges.

The avant-garde has brought forth, this session, no less than four books, three of which—from frank lack of sympathy—I will dispose of

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perfunctorily. Two are programmatic experiments in something called Neo-Narrative, a device for responding directly to reality without the clumsy intervention of grammar. Though presented (appropriately) in non-sequiturs and illogicalities, the principle itself doesn't dismay me; its applications do. *Concretions,* by Miss Arlene Zekowski, and *Dialogues,* by Mr. Stanley Berne, produce their effect on the first page; after that, it's mostly a matter of keeping your eyes open and watching the words go by. There are moments when the authors, false to their principles, let some grammatical connections slip in, by implication or overtly (Mr. Berne is more permissive this way than Miss Zekowski), and then one trembles on the verge of a literary experience. But mostly no.

The Soft Machine, by William (*Naked Lunch*) Burroughs, was published in Paris and seems to have had trouble with the fuzz, but honestly, there's nothing to worry about. The technique is collage and cutup; apparently the text was produced by mincing eight or ten copies of a short sketch and then distributing the pieces around. Since the basic episode is a couple of homosexuals (maybe 3?) in the process of doing what they do, a certain rhythmic monotony, not unlike that produced by seasickness with a high fever, soon makes itself felt. Unlike the Neo-Narrative folk, Mr. Burroughs does have a literary sensitivity, and his lurid, neon images occasionally fuse into nightmare phantasmagorias of considerable power. There is even a sort of indistinct progression from one end of *The Soft Machine* to the other, but it comes from disregarding the principle of cutup for straightforward development of image and episode, and I was not aware of its producing in me any "vast eocene nostalgia." Zymotic just possibly, but not eocene.

Anything the fiction chronicler says about Claude Mauriac's *The Marquise Went Out at Five* is bound to be provisional, for the book takes more knowing than an omnibus reviewer can possibly give it; but it is, even on first acquaintance, a highly entertaining experience. Through snatches of dialogue, monologue, reminiscence, and sense-impression, Mauriac undertakes to describe an hour in the existence of a number of people passing by or living in the Carrefour de Buci just off Place St. Germain. There are no guidelines or signposts; one has to find out for oneself whose mind, at any given point, one is in, and this implies a good deal of gradual familiarizing oneself with the terrain. Through the thoughts of an antiquarian bookseller and a working novelist, the book also reaches back into the history of the district, enriching its pages with street-cries, tax-lists, popular songs, legal depositions, and episodes from novels and memoirs pertaining to this particular spot of earth. Structurally, the book holds together through patterns of recurrence and analogy, and by the efforts of Carnejoux, the Gidean novelist, to control his materials. It holds together, also, by virtue of Mauriac's concern with what he sees as the

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recurrent Parisian character. Defying probability, he has eliminated almost all foreigners from the Carrefour de Buci. There is a tourist, but he comes from Marseilles; some Burgundians, who invaded the city in 1418, are rather more immediate than the Nazis, who left in 1945; and there are a couple of Algerians, being tortured in 1960, in counterpoint with a man brutally murdered in 1588 on the pretext of heresy. But as the book is essentially about Paris, that shabby, lacquered, arrogant city, only Parisians for the most part are allowed to take part in it.

Readers who are still breathless from their romp with *Pale Fire* may very well hesitate to undertake *The Marquise* because of the sheer problem of identifying voices; and at first glance, Mauriac's failure to provide even the simplest of clues is bound to seem perverse. But most of the characters do have a set of individual coordinates, by which one recognizes them sooner or later; and some, who don't, can be very adequately accepted as common voices of the city. As a matter of fact, the first time through, one might do well to cultivate a little indifference to personalities. The "Marquise" of the title is probably a fat old homosexual voyeur, who talks incessantly to himself; Desprez the bookseller and Carnejoux the novelist are the only other identities one really needs. Like the "Wandering Rocks" section of *Ulysses, The Marquise* has a pattern which hardly depends on individual identities. The title of Mauriac's novel comes from a phrase of Valéry's, expressing impatience with the machinery of 19th-century verisimilitude. The novelist has gained very little if he has escaped from this machinery only to leave his reader obsessed with its absence.

What, then, are Mauriac's achievements? A view of one spot in depth, as an overscribbled palimpsest of history; a sense of individual action as random, incoherent, fantasy-ridden, convulsively incomplete; a definition of a world which is sensual, witty, corrupt, alive. What he cannot or does not choose to present is the experience of intimacy. As they buzz or loiter through the Carrefour de Buci, the Parisians reflect on one another's surfaces, listen to one another's noises, but make no real contact with one another's minds, cycling forever silently within their private voids. Whether this is a consequence of Mauriac's method or a quality of his vision, one cannot tell; it certainly contributes to the sense of his book as a hard hollow shell, murmuring the impersonal music of time.

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MARIUS BEWLEY

Northern Saints and Southern Knights

IT IS AN UNUSUAL AMERICAN who hasn't an abolitionist or a planter hiding in him somewhere. This kind of partisanship is not complicated, and neither for the most part are the books on the Civil War that it produces. Mr. Wilson's latest book[1] is a good deal more complex than that. I believe some earlier reviews have found it simply pro-Confederate in sympathy, but his attitudes toward the issues involved are sufficiently elusive to exonerate him from conventional allegiance to either side, and they call for close examination. Rewarding as the book is in most respects, certain questions never seem to be satisfactorily resolved. Mr. Wilson judges the Civil War from his appalled sense of what he believes to be its consequences in the present. What he abhors in the modern world he abhors with good reason, but the historical genealogy of these abominations is neither convincingly nor forthrightly presented here. This is a slighter qualification of the book's merits than one might suppose, but it should be appreciated from the first. Mr. Wilson is profoundly opposed to certain forces or tendencies in the modern state that he regards as far more sinister than anything to be found in Confederate ideology. These tendencies were given a tremendous impetus by the Civil War and by the philosophy of government developed in the North both during and after the Conflict. Hence the war as a whole, but particularly the North's role in it, are open to grave censure.

It may be possible to understand Mr. Wilson's position more clearly by comparing his attitude to the Confederacy with his attitude to the American Indians. Several years ago in *Apologies to the Iroquois* Mr. Wilson wrote an admirable exposé of those processes of coercion and bureaucratic bullying by which the state in our time is able to impose its will on a minority—or even on an apathetic majority—at the expense of individual rights and decency. Mr. Wilson was dealing with the shameful attempt of the Power Authority of New York under the chairmanship of that Apostle of Levelling, Robert Moses, to dispossess arbitrarily a handful of Indians of a part of their reservation guaranteed to them by the existence of eighteenth century treaties. Happily in this case Moses' idea of the good life—or of life-in-death—did not prevail. In detailing the story Mr. Wilson brilliantly presented the image of the twentieth century public servant in his most distasteful

[1]PATRIOTIC GORE: STUDIES IN THE LITERATURE OF THE CIVIL WAR, by *Edmund Wilson*. Oxford University Press. $8.50.

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and dangerous guise: an irresponsible wielder of official authority whose idea of progress and public development is at odds with basic concepts of individual human dignity. Emotionally Mr. Wilson seems to see the war of the North against the South in somewhat the same way that he saw the war of the Power Authority of New York against the Tuscarora nation. Mr. Wilson hates the modern state with its arbitrary exercise of power and its denial of the individual's limited responsibility for the direction of events. He hates bureaucracy, governmental anonymity, the absorbent power of the Federal authority. He hates these things because they produce Power Authorities and arrogant public servants that think God created man for them. It is difficult not to hate with him. But despite the brilliance of *Patriotic Gore,* it seems doubtful if the Civil War can really be judged in a frame this narrow.

As I have already said, this book is not conventionally pro-South in the way some have suggested. In dividing the honours between the two sides Mr. Wilson is remarkably bipartisan, and those chapters are best in which he deals with persons, whether of the North or of the South, whose understanding of issues is comprehensive enough to confer a dialectical centrality on their thought. The essay on Alexander H. Stephens, the Vice-President of the Confederacy, is especially suggestive of the nature of Mr. Wilson's partisanship—such as it is. After a vivid sketch of Stephens' character the essay concerns itself principally with his political philosophy as presented in his monumental work, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States.* Perhaps this work may have suggested the form in which *Patriotic Gore* itself is written. It consists of colloquies which, as Wilson describes the work, "take place between Stephens himself and a set of three imaginary Unionists who have come to see him at Liberty Hall.... The Professor, the Judge and the Major are allowed to express themselves, to counter the statements of Stephens with their Unionist version of recent events...." The contending voices of the two sides, present in Wilson's book by copious quotation, must have a somewhat similar effect. Stephens' constitutional philosophy, which Wilson describes at some length, is based on the legality of secession. This is of course a self-contained point that is not directly related to the question of slavery, and if there is an implicit assumption running through *Patriotic Gore* it seems to be that Stephens had the better of the argument with his Unionist friends. It is easy to understand Mr. Wilson's partiality for Stephens. He goes to the heart of the matter when he says: "The 'Monster,' as he calls it, that Stephens fears is 'the Demon of Centralism, Absolutism, Despotism'; and the warning against the danger of this is the burden of all his post-war writing." In many respects Stephens was one of the most admirable figures of the Confederacy. He nearly broke with Jefferson Davis when the latter found it necessary to restrict civil rights in the South in the prosecution of the War. Wilson quotes Stephens as saying

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that he opposed "the impressment of provisions at arbitrary prices—the suspension of the Writ of *Habeas Corpus,* and the raising of the necessary military forces by conscription. These last I considered not only radically wrong in principle, but as violative of the Constitution, and as exceedingly injurious to our Cause in their effects on the people." By way of chilling contrast, Wilson has quoted a few pages earlier the remark of Lincoln's Secretary of State, Seward: "I can touch a bell on my right hand and order the arrest of a citizen of Ohio. I can touch the bell again and order the arrest of a citizen of New York. Can Queen Victoria do as much?" And then Mr. Wilson rather mischievously adds the flea circus version of this shocking utterance by quoting Robert Moses in a footnote: "I can take your house away from you and arrest you for trespassing if you try to get back into it." Clearly Stephens seems to come off well in the comparison. He is more concerned with civil rights than Lincoln was; he seems a better sort than Seward; he stands for individual dignity and is no violator of private property. Wilson and Stephens are like one man in their fear of "the Demon of Centralism," and Wilson quotes Stephens on his conception of the radically limited powers of the Presidency with pleasure.

But there is a darker side to Stephens' political theory that does not come off as well. Speaking of the role of slavery he said that the Confederacy rested "upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man, that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition. This our new government is the first in the history of the world based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth." Although Mr. Wilson does not quote this specific remark, he quotes similar ones, too long to include here, and with a complacency I find difficult to reconcile with the defender of the Iroquois. "From the moment this man of principles," he says, "has established a principle that makes slavery obligatory, every step of the course of the South follows logically from his previous postulates." Perhaps: but who can any longer put faith in Stephens' interpretation of civil rights or of the meaning of despotism? At this point the Confederacy begins to resemble the Power Authority of New York more than it does the Tuscaroras.

The "Centralism" and "Despotism" of the Federal government that were given such an impetus by the Civil War have been incredibly accelerated, Mr. Wilson would say, by the historic developments of the twentieth century, and it is from our present darkness that he views the ancient events. On the nature of this present darkness he comments in his introduction with great persuasiveness. Although the following passage is a long one, it really must be quoted:

> After [the last World War] the troops and agents of the U.S.A. moved in all over Europe and Asia, from West Germany to South Korea, and we found ourselves confronted by the Soviet Union, which was also moving in. Neither the Soviet Russians nor we were very much

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beloved by the peoples in upon whom they had moved. The rivalry of power units had now reached an even more gigantic scale than that of the British and German Empires. The Russians and we produced nuclear weapons to flourish at one another and played the game of calling bad names when there had been nothing at issue between us that need have prevented our living in the same world and when we were actually, for better and worse, becoming more and more alike—the Russians emulating America in their frantic industrializing and we imitating them in our persecution of non-conformist political opinion, while both, to achieve their ends, were building up huge government bureaucracies in the hands of which the people have seemed helpless. We Americans, whose public officials kept telling us we were living in "the Free World," discovered that we were expected to pay staggering taxes of which it has been estimated that 70 per cent has been going not only for nuclear weapons capable of depopulating whole countries but also for bacteriological and biological ones which made it possible for us to poison the enemy with every abominable disease from pneumonia and encephalitis to anthrax, cholera, diphtheria and typhoid, as well as with such new devices as the chemical agent called "GB," which imitates the natural weapons of the Australian stone fish and the black widow spider in paralyzing the nerves of its victims so that a drop of it no larger than a dot can kill a man in fifteen minutes. We discovered that if we should refuse to contribute to these researches, we could be fined and clapped into jail—that we could even be clapped into jail if we protested against any of this by taking part in public demonstrations. We are, furthermore, like the Russians, being spied upon by an extensive secret police whose salaries we are required to pay, as we are required to pay, also, the salaries of another corps of secret agents who are infiltrating foreign countries. And while all this expenditure is going for the purpose of sustaining the United States as a more and more unpopular world power, as few funds as possible are being supplied to educate and civilise the Americans themselves, and generations of young people are growing up who at worst live a life of gang warfare, the highest objectives of which are brawling and killing and robbing, in the buried crowded slum streets of cities outside of which they can imagine no other world, and at best find little spur to ambition when they emerge from four years in college to face two years in the armed services in preparation for further large-scale wars at the prospect of taking part in which they rarely feel the slightest enthusiasm.

This is very well said—indeed, beautifully said. The description could scarcely be bettered in itself; but the relation between this picture of horror with which Mr. Wilson introduces his essays and the Civil War itself remains, to me at least, ultimately evasive and confusing. Mr. Wilson makes it a matter of implication and suggestion rather than

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of clear definition and reasoned argument, but it is fairly obvious what the implications are as far as the Civil War and the guilt of the North are concerned. "The truth is that the South since the Civil War," he says, "in relation to the Washington government, has been in a state of mind that has fluctuated between that of Hungary and that of the Ukraine in relation to the government of Moscow." One is impelled to ask: If the legality of secession had been granted by the North, would it really have checked the kind of "Centralism" Mr. Wilson deplores? Could that Kafka-esque night of the modern soul he has described so well have been avoided? Had the Confederacy really been able to found a nation on Alexander Stephens' philosophy of racial inequality and subordination, would there have been any less likelihood of our persecuting non-conformist political opinion today? Despite its rather flamboyant acknowledgement of civil rights, would that political philosophy, based as it was on the cornerstone of slavery, have discouraged the Nazis? And if America now has gang warfare of the worst kind, what reasons are there for supposing that the Ku Klux Klan and the White Camellia represented higher moral types than our own juvenile criminals? Have the senators from the South represented, on the whole, an ideal of human dignity one could wish to see strengthened? Is it not possible that an independent Dixie might have become merely another political asylum for discredited European fascists?

But it would be unfair to emphasize this aspect of *Patriotic Gore* unduly. Taking the book as a whole, Mr. Wilson is not *for* the South as much as he is *against* the whole disastrous fact of the Civil War. In dealing with the men and women who were the leaders of thought and action, he measures out honours and demerits with a superbly bipartisan hand, while he sees both the North and the South falsifying equally the image of itself under which each fought the war. Any warring nation is compelled to justify itself by devising a conventional image of its aims and behavior, designed primarily to delude itself rather than the enemy. Both the North and the South created false masks through which they peered, admiring their own disguised reflections in the literature and oratory of the time. Mr. Wilson is particularly good in suggesting the existence and progress of that deliberately cultivated mystical bent that persuaded so many Northerners that the Lord had handed them His sword of vengeance. No doubt the decline of Calvinism in New England had left a residue of mystical aspirations that the more unemotional worship supplanting it could not utilize, but which the war could. Certainly there is something pathological about many of its manifestations. Wilson's discussion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's husband, Calvin Stowe, is very revealing. All his life he had had weird visions of little animated creatures, usually in human form, of "a darkly bluish color spotted with brown," who lived in constant terror of black funnel-shaped clouds that floated overhead. If one of the little creatures were touched by a cloud "the body

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was drawn into the cloud and became a part of its substance. It was indeed a fearful sight," Stowe says, "to see the contortions, the agonizing efforts, of the poor creatures who had been touched by one of these awful clouds, and were dissolving and melting into it by inches without the possibility of escape or resistance." On one occasion he awakened to find a large blue skeleton in bed beside him, and Harriet herself seems to have had a doppelgänger that on at least one occasion embarrassed her husband. Stowe had been born in Massachusetts and later taught at Bowdoin College. Wilson's portrait of him is suggestive of that peculiar ambience of frustrated Calvinism and mystical yearning that would help to stimulate the North's sense of divine mission.

The image the North formed of itself is better defined in the work of the almost forgotten Francis Grierson, to whom Mr. Wilson devotes some of his most interesting pages. After Calvin Stowe, who resembled a rabbi according to George Eliot, Grierson presents an unexpected version of the Northern saint. A young man who had met him wrote: "I had never seen a man with lips and cheeks rouged and eyes darkened. His hair was arranged in careful disorder over his brow, his hands elaborately manicured and with many rings on his fingers; he wore a softly tinted flowing cravat." One can mention Grierson here only in relation to the Lincoln cult. Wilson quotes this from one of his books: "Abraham Lincoln, the greatest practical mystic the world has known for nineteen hundred years, is the one man whose life and example ought to be clearly set before the English-speaking people.... His genius was superhuman. And since this world is not governed by chance, a power was at work which foreordained him for his unique mission.... That Lincoln possessed intuition and illumination without resorting to human aid is clear. His words were simple and his actions were simple, like those of the Hebrew seers...." It is perhaps appropriate that Grierson's last book, written as an old man, should have been published in Los Angeles—a series of "psycho-phone" communications from, among others, Lincoln and Grant. The Northern sense of divine mission that is found in "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," that is powerfully present to the imagination in the figure of Lincoln, and that, indeed, was a kind of holy atmosphere that the North breathed in those days, was certainly not hypocritical. Even today it has a note of irresistible beauty about it. But it was a false and dangerous image: how false, Wilson makes cruelly clear by his sharply drawn contrast between the Northern picture of the martyred God-commissioned John Brown and the barbarous reality of his murders for the Lord.

The false image of itself that the Confederacy created is less attractive and even more untrue: an artificial Walter Scott world, sentimental, intellectually deadening, devoid of authentic values. "The Northerner as well as the Southerner," Wilson writes, "is likely to be taken in by an historical optical illusion which makes it appear that the

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life of the South in the period just before the war was still something majestic and lovely; but we must not forget Olmstead's discovery that the 'gentry' of the 'colony days' now consisted of a very few families 'in a region much larger than the old German Empire.'" The reference is of course to Frederick Olmstead whose sociological study of the South, *The Cotton Kingdom,* appeared in 1861. Even though the gulf between Southern aristocratic pretensions and the reality is familiar to modern readers through more recent books like W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South,* Wilson's full summary of the depressing conditions described in *The Cotton Kingdom* provides a richly ironic background to his scattered discussions of the Southern code of honour, chivalry and dueling. The South's fatuous faith in dueling in particular arouses Wilson's contempt, and he sees in it one of the explanations for the South's readiness to fire on Fort Sumter. Just as the North was sincere in its belief it was divinely commissioned, the South was no less convinced it was playing a role of knightly heroism. But as compared with the Northern saints, there is something a little too self-consciously histrionic about these Southern knights. "I was better dressed that evening than I ever was during the war," writes the Confederate guerrilla fighter, John Mosby. "Just before starting to Richmond I got through the blockade across the Potomac a complete suit from head to foot. I had a drab hat with an ostrich plume, with gold cord and star; a heavy, black beaver-cloth overcoat and cape lined with English scarlet cloth, and as it was a stormy evening, over this I wore a gray cloak, also lined with scarlet." The values of these Southerners may be noble enough, but one thinks of artificial rather than of living flowers. I know of nothing better on the Georgia poet, Sidney Lanier, than the critical discussion of him in this book. Lanier accomplished some interesting work, but most of the time his sensibility seems as false and contrived as that sham code of chivalry with which so many Southern writers had become infatuated. "Perhaps you know that with us of the younger generation in the South since the War, pretty much the whole of life has been merely not-dying," he wrote to a friend. The horrors of the Reconstruction would be enough to explain such exhaustion, but one suspects that a better explanation could be found in a sensibility nurtured on artificial literary conventions and values incapable of supporting authentic life. Both the Northern saint and the Southern knight are for Mr. Wilson false images by means of which the Unionists and the Confederates duped each other, but most of all themselves. They represent "fraudulent traditions." In the wake of the saint and the knight has come the juvenile delinquent. Instead of "this absurd centennial," says Mr. Wilson, "a day of mourning would have been more appropriate."

I have remarked already on the admirable Plutarchan contrasts through which the biographical portions of the book are balanced between North and South. Rather unexpectedly, the hero of *Patriotic*

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Gore seems to be General Grant, who is approached by way of the *Personal Memoirs*. The simple decency of Grant, whether dealing with his soldiers, the army horses, or even the fowls in his barnyard, enables Wilson to write one of his most affecting portraits. But Grant's nobility Northern-style is conscientiously balanced by its Southern equivalent in Lee. Similarly, the Fascist taint that discolours General Sherman's image is carefully matched with the repulsive Cromwellianism of Stonewall Jackson. And so it goes through a roster of some thirty names.

A considerable portion of *Patriotic Gore* deals with the literature of the Civil War. Mr. Wilson is handicapped here by the fact that this literature is for the most part inferior. Although there are good discussions of Harriet Beecher Stowe, George W. Cable, Albion Tourgée, George Washington Harris, and Sidney Lanier, Wilson's critical treatment of more important writers such as Whitman and Melville is curiously pedestrian. Without being positively unfair to Whittier, Mr. Wilson like everybody else in our time underestimates him. Whittier was the Archibald MacLeish of his day, but his poetry is better. The closing pages of *Snow-Bound* are great enough as poetry to redeem a corpus of verse much inferior to Whittier's. Discussing Melville's poetry, Wilson concentrates on *The Scout toward Aldie*. "What Melville has revealed in the fanciful tale . . . is a mutual fascination of each of the two camps with the other, the intimate essence of a conflict which, though fratricidal, was also incestuous." And following this up with a glance in the direction of Julien Green's much later Civil War drama, *Sud,* he says: "The novelty of *Sud,* however, is that the central North-South relationship is a homosexual one." These are observations one wishes Mr. Wilson had left to Mr. Leslie Fiedler, but there aren't many of them, and one easily forgives them for the sake of his distinguished attack on Southern humourists like George Washington Harris and A. B. Longstreet in the essay on Sut Lovingood, the name of Harris' degraded and sadistic Southern "cracker." For some years there has been a conspiracy among certain scholars and critics of American literature to present characters like Sut Lovingood and the sub-human creatures that fill the pages of Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* and a whole library of similar books as somehow admirable, examples of good clean fun and earthy vitality instead of the ugly monsters of degenerate sensibility that in reality they are. Mr. Wilson does a mopping-up job that ought to put an end to this farce for all time, but probably won't because too many scholars of American literature have invested entirely too much in these hideous caricatures of the human image. Once they are seen for what they are, perhaps they hold an interest of a non-literary kind, as phenomena that are related to the Southern scene as a whole. The quality of Mr. Wilson's criticism is apparent in such insights as this: "The dreamy nobility of a man like Lanier and the murderous clowning of Harris are products of the same society, and the two men have something in common."

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When the pro-Southern bias of which *Patriotic Gore* gives ample evidence is carefully analyzed, it is seen to be of an unconventional kind that resolves itself into a fear of "Centralism" in the state rather than into any love for the Myth of the Old South. The one disappointing aspect of the book lies in Mr. Wilson's failure to correlate convincingly this "Monster" of modern "Centralism" with what he considers to be its seeds germinated in the Civil War. His attempts to do so, centred in the introduction but scattered throughout the book, are not forthright—indeed, are downright devious at times. And in any case, Mr. Wilson's dislike and fear of "Centralism" is not a reassuring part of his argument. But such is the nature of the book that this objection can scarcely be called a major one. The picture of the Civil War world it gives is so vivid, its rendering of personality so dramatic, that it is easily his most entertaining work.

MARVIN MUDRICK

The Possibility of Criticism

"WHY DON'T YOU OFFER some *con*structive criticism?" said the Carpenter sternly to the Walrus, who had just ventured to remark that the bench they sat on was beginning to split. In this parable the Carpenter is the Man Who Has Published a Book, the bench is the Book, and the Walrus is the Reviewer. Mr. Jarrell reminds us that Conrad exclaimed: "I don't want criticism, I want praise!" What the Carpenter wants isn't criticism, it's praise; and the Walrus keeps staring nervously at the widening fissure in the plank. Still worse for the Walrus: what if the Carpenter is himself a Walrus in a dustjacket? since all five of these books,[1] more or less militant against critics and reviewers, are themselves random gatherings of reviews and other critical pieces. It gets to be rather incestuous, criticizing critics who are critical of criticism.

At any rate, here are the books and their polemic against walruses. Harvey Swados characterizes critics as "a body of venomous or disappointed men," and, writing with the bumpiness of a lyrically incompe-

[1] A RADICAL'S AMERICA, by *Harvey Swados*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $5.00. CONTEMPORARIES, by *Alfred Kazin*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $7.50. ASSAYS, by *Kenneth Rexroth*. New Directions. $4.50. A SAD HEART AT THE SUPERMARKET, by *Randall Jarrell*. Atheneum. $4.50. THE CHARTED MIRROR, by *John Holloway*. Horizon. $4.50.

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tent carpenter, urges "the intelligent reader" to believe that, "if what I am going to say has any validity, . . . the contemporary novelist [Mr. Swados is, in other books of his, a contemporary novelist] still has the power to speak to him, to touch his heart, to open for him, even in his own house, doors the keys to which he thought had been lost and which could not be forced by other locksmiths." Alfred Kazin, a critic and reviewer by vocation, declares inaccessible to the critic "the inner shrewdness of the creative writer"; denies knowledgeability to literary criticism, which, he says, is "technical only when it illuminates a technique that one practices oneself; nobody can 'explain' what makes a book good, or even what a book wholly is, least of all if he cannot write a book like it" (*i. e.,* to read Shakespeare you must *be* Shakespeare; nobody else need apply; are there any other jobs for unemployed critics?); and, in a sacrificial frenzy, categorically dismisses himself and everybody else turning in regular reviews: "No one who reviews all the specimens of an art regularly, by the day or the week, by the performance or the exhibition, can ever be better than, can really be *different* from, the stuff he works in" (*i. e.,* "they that touch pitch. . . ."; and so, sadly, we give up old illusions—Shaw's impudent spotlight on music in London during the 'eighties and 'nineties, Stark Young's theater reviews, B. H. Haggin's twenty years of weekly comment on music in *The Nation*). Kenneth Rexroth takes his stand, as poet, political freethinker, and self-trained polymath, against the academy: between fraternity-party jokes about "English 7649328 A—Forms and Techniques of English Verse," he strikes down at one blow the ivy critics and Mr. Eliot, "who has provided two generations of professsors with their slim stock of ideas." Randall Jarrell resembles Mr. Kazin in his trust of poets and distrust of critics: "Criticism," he says archly, "is the poetry of prosaic natures"; and, in company with Mr. Swados, he wants not critics but warm, human, live *readers,* who "ought to realize that it is not, unfortunately, in the writer's power to control what he writes: something else originates and controls it, whether you call that something else the unconscious or Minerva or the Muse. The writer writes what he writes just as the public likes what it likes; he can't help himself, it can't help itself, but each of them has to try." (No, I'm not making this up; Mr. Jarrell really wrote it.) As for Mr. Holloway, he is content to distinguish himself, with a British and academic hauteur that would infuriate Mr. Rexroth, from that sort of critic who holds up works of art "before the distorting mirror of a powerfully and interestingly subjective vision."

What these books share, endearingly, is the conviction that there is a common reader they can somehow reach, if only his innocence remains unviolated by critics (*other* critics). It is a conviction prodigiously flattering to both readers and critics. For an agonized, naïve, maladroit champion of the oppressed like Mr. Swados, it provides the motive for his exhortations as well as for his refusal, in spite of doomsday omens,

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to despair: the reader he cherishes and defends is that battered dream of a hero, the workingman.

A Radical's America is, as the title indicates, primarily a political and sociological book. In his Introduction, Mr. Swados mentions "the most important matters in the world, peace and racial integration," describes himself as an anti-liberal and anti-Stalinist socialist, and, preparing to denounce the first months of the Kennedy Administration, anathematizes "the professors and liberals who utilize the perversions of socialism as an excuse to capitulate to the bottomless hypocrisy of American capitalism." Fair enough (though we wince at the rhetoric): he lets us know his exposed position, and holds it with angry consistency throughout the book. Out of this old-fashioned, quasi-populist radicalism (appropriately, his first two essays are on *The Jungle* and "The Reform Journalism of the Muckrakers"), he is able to report sympathetically on miners, factory workers, strikers, union leaders; he points out the hatefulness of work and the impossibility of "fruitful leisure" in "a commercially oriented culture"; he accounts for the popularity of *The Caine Mutiny* by demonstrating how its bold and carefully fabricated new image of America helped the American middle class accommodate itself to the fact of a permanent war economy; he attacks Leslie Fiedler's indictment (in *An End to Innocence*) of just about anybody who had a kind thought about anybody else in the 'thirties (though he is miles from the wit and skill with which Harold Rosenberg performed, in *The Tradition of the New,* the classic eviscerration of this unlucky effort); he even proposes a project for serious young people that seems to have been the specific inspiration for the Peace Corps.

Yet nobody appears in all these essays. They are written by a politician, not a novelist; they shout and grow indignant, or approve and are glad, at types, straw-men, cowardly academics, wicked critics and publishers, bad bosses, good workers. Here are some strikers, as calico-wholesome as the billionaires in *Little Orphan Annie:* "Mrs. Martha Webster, a gentle, tired widow . . . Mrs. Carrie Boyd, a jolly widow"; " 'I never was one for politics,' muses a gray-haired lady as she bends over the icebox to get out some food for the menfolks." This is how Mr. Swados sees issues, through faces drawn in thirty-year-old socialist cartoons, in quotations from nameless "little people" as phony in their perfect wisdom as the anonymous tycoons and colonels invented weekly by *Time* to drive home the latest necessary pipedream.

Only a politician, or anybody else who uses language to block his view of the object, could be guilty of phrases and sentences like these: "remedial reform legislation was enacted which did much to halt the revolutionary upsurge that Sinclair had been hoping to implement"; "the price paid by countless thousands to build what is known as a civilization"; "the news of this spreading stream of gravy seeps through even to those who aren't getting any of it"; "works which hesitate no

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more than this remarkable play to slash through the treacly morality of bourgeois society and to reveal yet one more aspect of that inner truth that is the heart and function of all art worthy of the name." This is Mr. Swados' idiom. Only a politician so Candidean as to break our hearts could end, having surveyed the twin deserts of work and leisure in American life, by entrusting to "the imagination of our younger generation of social scientists" the creation of "a social order in which both work and leisure will be rationally based," and "the masses of man will be protected against the swelling flood of 'entertainment' opiates in order that they may be energized to search freely for new patterns of spontaneous living for themselves and their children." This is Mr. Swados' notion of what's to be done and who's to do it, expressed in the same frightful idiom. If, as he insists, critics are only "drum-beaters" and "vulgar hucksters," they will surely not be enlightened out of their iniquity by books whose style and purpose beat the drum and make the hard sell for a society of gentle, jolly, gray-haired workers seeking new patterns of spontaneous living under the direction of bright young sociologists. But then Mr. Swados does not, on *prima facie* evidence, believe in style; nor, probably, does he believe it has anything to do with honesty, intelligence, openness, the ability to see what is there.

Read in snippets in the Sunday *Times,* Alfred Kazin is a smoother and more ingratiating writer than Mr. Swados. *Contemporaries,* however, contains 509 pages of closely printed criticism, mostly reviews; and ploughing through it all at a few sittings enables one to understand why Mr. Kazin has such a low opinion of the capabilities of critics. There is an unhappy introductory essay on "The Background of Modern Literature," a textbook piece full of dull thuds: "For nothing is more central to contemporary experience, more obvious, than the increasing loss of religious faith"; "The 1920s marked a true renaissance"; "It was a time when films were consciously an art"; "the greatest writers of our time have celebrated in literature man's increasing contact with the profundities of his own experience." What follows is a very long series of literary essays whose intention seems to be quintessentially judicial, every writer and book in their respective right places in the pantheon; and, read one each week in the calm stupefaction of a Sunday morning, they might appear, if not definitive, at least usefully discriminating.

Thus, on page 44, Mr. Kazin writes that "Emerson's genius is . . . contentedly solitary (where Thoreau's is lonely) . . ." and we nod interestedly; but we are shaken to discover on page 47, in the next essay, that "Thoreau . . . celebrates in his self-portrait the most mulishly solitary character in modern literature." Or, on page 43, "the genius of Emerson is . . . that his professional need to write essays and to deliver lectures did not pressure him out of his natural tendency to the orphic, the fragmentary, the epigram"; whereas, on page 103, "if Gertrude

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Stein . . . has become finally unreadable, it is because she did not think in terms of books at all but in orphic sayings, sentences, rhythmic paragraphs that brought home the sound of herself thinking to herself . . . creativity is a matter of achieving whole works, not of ideas for books or brilliant passages in books."

The appearance of judgment and fine discrimination is a mirage. Mr. Kazin is not thinking of the subject or his words about it, rather his mind is on the problem of grinding out one more corn-flavored sawdust sausage. He has opinions: he is mad about Melville, Emily Dickinson, Faulkner, has reservations about Thoreau, dislikes Howells, admires Dreiser, is immensely respectful of the high-tea inanities of C. P. Snow. He likes to concoct unleavened aphorisms and embarrassing metaphors: "There are no gods in Faulkner's world; there are only men"; "Without man, there is utter silence"; "no writer of [Malamud's] background . . . comes so close to the bone of human feeling"; "If [Thoreau] could have rolled himself up in the world, have tasted it in every cell of his being . . ."; or, growing anxious, he shields himself behind a foreign pseudonym (we shall see that Mr. Jarrell enjoys this little joke too)—a certain "Goethe," who is purported to have thought, in ballooning Kazin-like cosmic-type banalities, that "a 'shudder of awe' . . . was man's only proper response to life and death."

The word for this sort of writing is journalism in one of its definitions, the triumph of expedience over truth; and, except for rare moments of attentiveness ("Several weeks ago I was awakened, while reading *The New Yorker* . . ."), nothing much better can be claimed for Mr. Kazin's literary essays. In another definition of journalism—lively and unillusioned reporting on celebrities, places, politics, the superficies of current events—Mr. Kazin is also, and more usefully, a journalist, particularly in an astute account of the President as a new self-created culture-hero, the grown-up quiz kid assimilating libraries of fact and daring to pick the brains of intellectuals, the knowing custodian and chief button-pusher of our age: "To be an 'intellectual,'" concludes Mr. Kazin, "is the latest style in American success, the mark of our manipulatable society." And there are entertainingly sardonic impressions of West Germany, the Soviet Union, Israel, Puerto Rico.

There is, finally, a specially sharp scrutiny of a writer who is less a literary than a minor cultural phenomenon. Kenneth Rexroth, says Mr. Kazin,

> has the ingrained bitterness of those who have grown up in poverty, who have had to educate themselves in public libraries, who are constantly enraged by the attempt of university "New Critics" to divorce literature from life, by the attempt of our leading statesmen, with their pseudo-moral imbecilities, to evade the unsettling future. . . . However, it must be admitted that while Rexroth as a critic always tries to stir up the Philistines . . . he is actually not very interesting.

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He is a terrible show-off of his own learning, and though he calls himself a literary journalist in the tradition of Huneker, Mencken, and Wilson, he seeks to impress rather than to persuade. He is an impressionist of art, of all the arts, rather than a critic, and there is a certain solemn rapture about his attempts to put jazz and painting into words.

Mr. Kazin is talking about an earlier collection, *Bird in the Bush;* but what he says will do equally well for *Assays.* The saddest fact about *Assays* is how uninterruptedly and unintentionally funny it is. The author makes grandiose gestures that welcome the reader as a peer into his clubby community of encyclopedic lore: "Kabbalism also includes, of course, a group of divinatory and magical practices, manipulations of the alphabet and the text of the Pentateuch. . . ."; "We have all heard the wisecrack about Gibbon's *Autobiography.* . . ."; "It is of course to Gibbon's letters to Suzanne Churchod that you turn first. . . ."; "As everybody knows, [Van Gogh] was devoted to Japanese prints." Or he dazzles the reader with firecracker strings of names and mystic words: "For five years in Europe his work was full of echoes of Apollinaire, Rimbaud, Cendrars, Soupault . . . even Tristan Tzara and Roger Vitrac"; "it is a brave and very precious sort of soul that finds Abadie and Violet le Duc more exciting than Phidias and Sacré Coeur more fun than Amiens"; "Now that the dust of the explosions of the epoch from Apollinaire to Georges Schéhadé is dying away, it does not sound so incredible to recall that the great international influences in poetry in the early years of this century were Jammes and Verhaeren"; "Nothing is more illuminating than to look up 'Shekinah' or 'Succoth' or 'Wisdom' or 'Power' or for that matter any of the other epithets of the *Sephiroth* in a good Biblical concordance, and ponder on the mysterious sentences." Or he puts world masterpieces in their place: Van Gogh "was indisputably one of the very greatest letter writers who ever lived . . . another of the Hundred Best Books the man forgot to put on that list"; "Gibbon's *Decline* is probably the greatest achievement of eighteenth-century Europe; it is also one of the ten great prose works of all time, ranking just below Thucydides, *Genji* and *Don Quixote*" (though, while we wait breathlessly, he never names the other six).

Not only is he "a terrible show-off of his own learning," but he hasn't the fuzziest idea of what to do with it. He is a manic cultural gossip-columnist, babbling names, dates, and places from his cavernous file of 3 × 5 cards, trying to hold off questions of why and how with geysers of irrelevant erudition. It's not that he doesn't try to deliver judgments; when he does he almost stops being funny. "Kenneth Patchen is one of the Old Masters of the universe of discourse which is that of American poetry after the Second World War"; "Edith Sitwell is the nearest thing to a major poet that the British Isles have produced since Hardy,

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Lawrence and Yeats"; Denise Levertov "is not only the most subtly skillful poet of her generation, she is far and away the most profound, and what may be more important, the most modest and the most moving"; "Brother Antoninus is a rough, urgent, startlingly honest poet, with a passionate identification with the Californian landscape." Mr. Rexroth is also very happy about the college students of today ("incomparably better educated and more concerned than their elders"), and about poetry and San Francisco: "In San Francisco . . . began the now fabulously successful oral presentation of poetry"; poetry "has become a genuinely popular art in America." He makes inside Freudo-literary jokes: "For forty years [Parkman] devoted himself to justifying the triumph of anal over oral sexuality—or, in the words of another great Puritan, the ways of God to man." It is perhaps not impertinent to add that his taste for verse—which he quotes by the yard, usually translations from the Chinese or Japanese by himself and others—runs to filmy nostalgic stuff, the Orient in nylon baby-doll pyjamas:

> Across the pulsating curtains
> Confused flower shadows flicker.
> All alone in the summer house,
> Wordless, I stroke a rose jade flute.

—rather like the languorously hissing geisha voice of the stewardess on West Coast FM advertisements, hinting at the sybaritic delights of a trip to Zensville via Japan Air Lines.

There's nothing exotic about Randall Jarrell; he's just folks, bluff, genial, one hand on your shoulder and the other in your pocket, pleading for good-fellowship, nay affection, nay love. Ordinariness is one of the blue-ribbon specials at Mr. Jarrell's supermarket. He loathes "the gray dutiful world of the professional critic" who has no time "to read at whim," and he turns with a grateful sigh to "the sunlight and shadow, the unconsidered joys, the unreasoned sorrows, of ordinary readers and writers, amateurishly reading and writing 'at whim.'" Not for him the strained and strange: "Ordinary human feeling, the most natural tenderness, will seem to many critics and readers rank sentimentality, just as a kind of nauseated brutality (in which the writer's main response to the world is simply to vomit) will seem to many critics and readers the inescapable truth" (since he allows us to imagine our own instances of both, let us guess that he wishes us to think of Randall Jarrell as the embattled lonely proponent of "ordinary human feeling" and of, say, Baudelaire as the advocate of "nauseated brutality"). Critics are bad clean through, and, having disposed of them, he asks, "What would an ideal public do? Mainly, essentially, it would just read the poet; read him with a certain willingness and interest; read him imaginatively and perceptively." Notice the adverbs that are supposed to bear the weight of thought: *mainly, essentially, imaginatively, perceptively*—the adverbs that a tired pro-

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fessor of literature slips past his dozing freshmen at a quarter to three on a warm afternoon in May. Mr. Jarrell is not too proud to perform such squalid little obfuscations in the public forum, in a book, in cold immortal print.

Moreover, unwilling to take the blame for everything he says, he adopts Mr. Kazin's strategy of dreaming up an *alter ego* called "Goethe" and puts him busily to work cranking out all sorts of silly sayings which, if one doesn't think about them, almost look intelligent at first sight:

> "Seeing someone accomplishing arduous things with ease gives us an impression of witnessing the impossible."
>
> "A work of art is just as much a work of nature as a mountain."
>
> "In every artist there is a germ of recklessness without which talent is inconceivable."
>
> "Against criticism we can neither protect nor defend ourselves; we must act in despite of it, and gradually it resigns itself to this."

Nobody objects to an occasional literary leg-pull; still, it seems a bit insulting for Mr. Jarrell to go so far as to credit this "Goethe" with a career and even a last wish: "Goethe, very winningly, wanted to have put on his grave a sentence saying that he had never been a member of any guild, and was an amateur until the day he died." But since to the acute ear the voice is unmistakably the voice of the supermarket proprietor, speaking through a mouthful of sauerkraut, the joke doesn't really go too far. He's a great kidder, though.

After these four Americans have done their worst, John Holloway comes with sepulchral tread—Cambridge poet, Cambridge don, Cambridge mortician of the arts—to bury literature and criticism together. At least, so one is convinced by reading the first half of *The Charted Mirror*. Mr. Swados is all grace and fire, Mr. Kazin all high seriousness, Mr. Rexroth the pattern of wit, Mr. Jarrell the soul of humane understanding, in comparison with the puckered, mincing, costive manner of Mr. Holloway: "This does summarize, in abstract form, what Keats told his reader in the concrete form of poetry"; "These restrictions of interest are precipitate; and a more systematic inquiry not only offers a more sensitive, balanced, comprehensive interpretation of each poem by itself, but seems to do something in addition"; "One truly vital contrast between Donne and Patmore . . . is therefore the different degree to which their work embodies a broad and rich and sensitive responsiveness to experience."

Mr. Holloway is a master of all the indeterminate gray horrors—the very slag of English—that lecturers in literature, on both sides of the Atlantic, daily mouth before their audience as the language of light. He compounds his sins with pet barbarisms: "crudify," "rigidify." He is that sort of donnish snob who can't be bothered to check with one of those science chaps: ". . . a freedom of combination which character-

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izes poetry at high temperatures, as I believe it does chemistry. . . ." He is even—a colonial scarcely dares mention it—capable of schoolboy illiteracy: "in that he was a greater 'master of language' than them"; "he is less moral than them."

His method of organizing an essay is to quote a critic, asseverate that the poor fellow went wrong in one ghastly way or another, and then proceed to prove, by magisterial trains of commonplace, that some commonplace or other is indeed a commonplace—as in "Dramatic Irony in Shakespeare" and "Patmore, Donne, and the 'Wit of Love.'" Sometimes he is merely wrong himself, as when he tries to refine a couple of cheaply sarcastic Swiftian adjectives to the level of Olympian satire in his otherwise dull and obvious essay on Swift; as in his dull and obvious essay on Keats, which quietly claims great things for itself, and which concludes with a calamitous misunderstanding of "Negative Capability" (I shall borrow a snobbish trick and simply direct Mr. Holloway to an article in the June 1952 issue of *PMLA*, "Negative Capability and Wise Passiveness," by Jacob D. Wigod, which should answer all his questions on the subject).

How, in the wake of such hopeless choked Philistinism, Mr. Holloway turns about and, in the second half of his schizoid book, produces some of the most necessary and most exhilaratingly sensible criticism of recent years—the question probably belongs to metaphysics rather than to book-reviewing. The fact is that this is what he does.

The reversal gets under way with two good essays on Hardy's fiction, particularly good in pointing a contrast between *Tess* and James's *The Awkward Age:*

> Tess the individual human, Tess as part of a social texture, Tess as ultimately an animal with an animal's task of maintaining life—Hardy sees all of these, they all enter into his account; but *The Awkward Age* constantly seems to invite awareness of what it then passes over in silence, or even positively excludes. It seems to give with one hand and deny with the other. For example, we read that Vanderbank gives out "the sacred terror," a wonderful personal magnetism. So he must, if a girl like the heroine is to be in love with him; but we never see it. We are given to understand that his society is a plutocracy, its male characters have to engage in affairs, and to make money, and this is partly what coarsens them. Mr. Brookenham is notoriously efficient, loves to talk about his job. We never see this either. And what *is* his job? "Oh, Rivers and Lakes—an awfully good thing. . . ."

James does not specify; he makes, as Mr. Holloway says, "mere gestures," whether in trying to fix Aggie as "a specimen of foolishly naïve innocence" by tagging her comments with coy, tendentious adverbs ("she spotlessly speculated"), or in failing to provide the details he "needs for his picture of a money society," or in his incapacity to

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suggest the bodily existence of a woman supposed to be all sensuous physicality:

> "Having been asleep in her clothes, Tess was as warm as a sunned cat." This physical side of Tess we have got to have, . . . and Hardy gives it to us here in a phrase. [James's] Mrs. Grendon was not like a sunned cat. What was she like? . . . James's moral insight is communicated at the price of no communication over what the moral insight was insight into; and through a good deal of this novel, he seems to have too full a sense of the issues, the necessary moral discriminations; and too thin a sense of the life, the realities, between which those issues must lie.

Then comes a temperate and intelligent piece on Wyndham Lewis (first published in *HR*), unusual enough in being both temperate and intelligent about Lewis:

> . . . violence is no meaningless device for enlivening a story, but a permanent, imminent and deeply significant hazard of life. There is no element of relish. Even a phrase like "horrified fascination" would be misleading. What violence evokes in Lewis is the horror it justifies in the timid man (the urbanized intellectual whose very existence it unremittingly threatens); and at the same time the cold, intent, and comprehensive regard of the courageous man.

Mr. Holloway suffers a brief slump with an inert think-piece on the ancestry and credentials of the angry young men, picks up a bit with a competent essay on Arnold, and pulls away in the last three essays, all of them on the most unpromising of critical subjects, the situation of criticism in our time.

"The Critical Intimidation" is a careful exposure of the covert deference which the New Critics—beginning with Mr. Eliot—have always paid to "a scientific norm of statement and method," and which is responsible for the "impurity" of " 'close reading' as a critical method":

> The poet [says Mr. Eliot] is a catalyst; and his mind is a "receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together." . . . The more these metaphors are thought of in the way that we have learnt from Eliot to think about metaphors, the more they lead . . . towards a notion of something on the lines of an elaborate scientific construct, a tour-de-force linguistic protein molecule, of which we can come to an understanding by the mode of attention of the scientist. . . .

—a notion which itself leads to the pursuit, in poems, of complexity as a sign and proof of value, to Mr. Empson's gigantesque frivolities, to an infinity of suggestiveness, so that "there is nothing the poet can

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definitely *not* say, definitely decline to say"; though in fact the poet (and novelist, and dramatist, and critic) so disposes his words as to block off at least as many possibilities of meaning as he solicits; though complexity is a criterion of quantity rather than of value.

The New Critics have been willing to yield up truth to science: "When Macbeth says 'Out, out brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, . . .' Professor Tate comments 'The lines . . . are certainly not "true": we know that life is not a shadow, it is a vast realm of biological phenomena.' " And they "make a present of prose" to the scientist, "as if prose never had a texture, was never itself literature, was essentially bare science," as if ordinary speech strove toward a *scientific* precision. But, as a matter of fact,

> "Ordinary" language—so far as we can identify such a thing at all—is very different from scientific description. It is full of remarks like "he is an ass" (compare *Life is a shadow*), "I am really in love with her," "we live in unhappy times," and so on, which may or may not employ metaphors and therefore be true only as a metaphorical statement is true (this is a simple point) but which all go definitely beyond "the level at which the scientist takes it" because they all try to record an impression, to be a vague but full report, to catch the total revelation, the quality of experience. In other words, the mode of utterance in which literature is straightforwardly true is perfectly familiar—more so perhaps than the mode of utterance of science—and nothing can make us in the least hesitate to see literature as capable of one straightforward kind of truth, and not supplanted by science but proceeding along a path divergent from it; nothing, that is, save a theoretical homage to a dominance by the scientific mode that our practice conclusively rejects.

"The New and the Newer Critics," beginning with a sympathetic consideration of the theory of the Chicago critics, goes on to note the poverty of their practice, and attributes this disappointing meagerness to a fatal defect in the theory. Having quoted Mr. Crane's "peculiar sequence of emotions" as the Chicagoist paradigm of the literary work, Mr. Maclean's "high order of distinctive pleasures," and Mr. Olson on his astonishingly cowboys-and-Indians explanation of how our emotions are frustrated or satisfied by a literary work, Mr. Holloway remarks that in the aesthetic experience "We feel, to put it briefly, because we grasp":

> There is no simple sense in which our desires are frustrated when Desdemona is killed or Oedipus found out, or satisfied when the traitor Macbeth is beheaded. . . . So far as these things go, our sympathy for the characters somehow co-exists with a detachment in which we accept—no, more than that, we demand—whatever is brought by the fable in its entirety. Our emotions of concern for the individual characters help to make possible other and more im-

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portant emotions, those which come directly through comprehension and contemplation, as we grasp the total reality which is the tide of events carried through to its end.

"The New 'Establishment' in Criticism" resumes the argument introduced in "The Critical Intimidation," and takes aim, this time, at that influential coterie of the New Criticism which, round the name and writing of F. R. Leavis, has stressed the moral nature of the insights afforded by close reading. In Mr. Leavis' own tendency toward violent hortatory pronouncements, Mr. Holloway mildly and accurately observes "a certain cryptic quality, . . . something which is not lucid in spite of much that is emphatic, which could lead others, if not their author, astray." In the course of dissecting a grotesque example, by one of Mr. Leavis' eager lieutenants, of the vice of overreading, Mr. Holloway demonstrates that New-Critical close reading—especially, close reading with the moral preoccupation prescribed by Mr. Leavis and his followers—shows itself almost helpless in the face of a large-scale work, and is liable to end, *because* of its minute concern with detail and texture, by reducing the great play or novel to a theme, a normative statement, a "universal truth," a big common idea that it may share with ten thousand other plays and novels of no consequence whatever. On the contrary, says Mr. Holloway, the distinction of "great imaginative literature" is that it continuously gives us the sense of something "amazing and exceptional," the sense that a grand and unique action, different from anything we have known, arises and moves and comes to a close in the necessary rhythms of its own identity:

> It is this completeness through to the end with which a particular case is depicted that distinguishes imaginative writing; this is what it does that no other kind of writing begins to do, and is thus what makes it irreplaceable. There is a speech by Anna Karenina which brings this out with beautiful exactness. She is half way through her disastrous affair with Count Vronsky. In speaking of it to her brother she says: "No, Stiva; I'm lost: worse than lost: I'm not lost yet—I can't say that all is over: on the contrary, I feel that it's not ended. I'm like an over-strained violin string that must snap. But it's not ended yet . . . and the end will be terrible." Anna's was, we might say, the perfect case of the disease, wonderfully complete and intensified—which is to say, highly exceptional—and she had to go right through to the end of it: there is its completeness and finality.

In the last hundred pages of his book, Mr. Holloway is that spoilsport, the critic; not a politician, not a dilettante, not a name-dropper, not a foot-in-the-door merchant of the arts; no querulous carpenter or tame, playful walrus either. Small wonder that the critic—grave and thorough beast, munching on their fragile public bones—is so worrisome a creature to Messrs. Swados, Kazin, Rexroth, and Jarrell.

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PATRICK CRUTTWELL

From Donne to Yeats

TWO BOOKS ABOUT POETRY of the seventeenth century; one about a major poet (Blake) of the 18-19th centuries; another about a major poet (Yeats) of the twentieth century; and a fifth about poetry in general and the parlous state it is in at present, by a poet and critic of the twentieth.[1] Their authors present a fine variety of age-groups and viewpoints, no less than the poets they write about. And the reading of them all sets up a host of topics and queries and doubts, easy to pose, not so easy to settle. What follows, I fear, will be something of a rambling discourse; might I apologise, in advance, to any of the authors who feel, as they very well may, that they have scarcely been "reviewed"—and say of all these books that no one who buys will have wasted his money?

Take the two on the seventeenth century. Alvarez in *The School of Donne* and Williamson in *The Proper Wit of Poetry* are both concerned with discussions strictly literary. They try to answer questions such as "Which poets were Donne's disciples and what did they learn from him?" or "When and how did the kind of verse which Donne wrote cease to be written?" or "What notions of 'wit' were current among writers of the age?"—and although extraneous matters, such as changes in philosophical and scientific thought, may be brought into the picture, they are kept in the background. But turn to Fisher on Blake, and at once the discussion is outside literature. The very subtitle of Fisher's book—"Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary"—tells us we are in another country: what poet of the "School of Donne" (or of the School of Dryden) would even dream of himself for two minutes in those roles? Alvarez describes the kind of public Donne and his friends wrote for: a small circle of gentry, men of the liberal professions, intelligent, sophisticated, highly educated talkers, who wrote verse for each other's amusement. Whom did Blake write for? For almost nobody, in brutal reality; for almost everybody—angels and demons and all mankind—in his dreams. So, by an odd irony, the poet who really wanted to change men, to act directly on society, was in fact far more isolated and ineffective than the poet who was simply a "wit writing for wits."

There are two questions here. There is the question of the poet and

[1] THE SCHOOL OF DONNE, by *A. Alvarez*. Pantheon Books. $3.75. THE PROPER WIT OF POETRY, by *George Williamson*. University of Chicago Press. $4.00. THE VALLEY OF VISION, by *Peter F. Fisher*. University of Toronto Press. $6.00. WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS, THE LYRIC OF TRAGEDY, by *B. L. Reid*. University of Oklahoma Press. $4.50. THE ESTATE OF POETRY, by *Edwin Muir*. Harvard University Press. $3.00.

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his public and that of the poet as enemy or accepter of his society. Edwin Muir's *The Estate of Poetry* presents what I suppose is the conventional picture. "The range and influence of poetry... has greatly shrunk in the last two centuries, and shrunk alarmingly in the century we live in"—and the reason? Megalopolis, Technology, the Modern World—and against these is set the "once-upon-a time" of the peasant community with its anonymous, happily integrated ballad-singers. We have heard it all before, it is indeed one of the stock dogmas of a whole school of literary critics, and although one hears it with more respect from Muir than from most (because Muir, brought up among the Orkney farms and then thrown into the hell of Glasgow about 1900, had living knowledge behind his theorising), still I wonder if it may be all a delusion. I suspect that the public for poetry *as such* has always been small, that what the ballad-singers', Homer's, Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, publics were really there for was the story and what goes with it—excitement, titillation, suspense, fun, identification with characters, etc.—and when poetry lost its hold on these things (first to prose, and now and in the future, perhaps, to TV), it automatically seemed to lose its large public: but only "seemed to," because it had never really had it. Muir dreams wistfully—and vaguely, it must be said—that "a great theme greatly treated might still put poetry back in its old place"; but for the present he can only deplore the sad state of the poet, shut up in his academic prison, with the academic critic as warder. (Cleanth Brooks, rather unfairly I feel, is cast for the role of Head Warder.)

It does sound sad, put like that; and oddly enough, Alvarez suggests (quite independently, of course) that the School of Donne came to an end because it too, through poetasters like Cleveland and Benlowes, became in a sense academic. "They were professionally learned and they often tried, it appears, to be professionally witty." It is clear that this kind of thing *can* happen. Poetry, like any other art, can find itself caught in a tight sterile circle where the only consumers are also the producers—of which a notable example was given in a recent *Hudson Review*, when James Dickey reached the point of saying that "the major good of writing a poem is done to the poet... determined to realize himself and to communicate even if there is no one to communicate with." Nothing, one might think, could be more "heartbreaking" (Mr. Dickey's word) than that. Yet is it a worse situation than Blake's was? Mr. Dickey's self-therapeutical ambitions have at least the virtues of modesty and not being a nuisance; but what Blake sought (according to Fisher) was to "redeem the entire perspective of history by an apocalyptic revolt in the ground of the human mind." I do not know what this means, but I can see that it means to mean something pretty big. And something futile—for it will never be done. This is where I find myself—with reluctance, but firmly—having to place Blake. He is the prototype of the Artist as Enemy, who degenerates so rapidly and inevitably into Artist as Crank. Behind him is

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a long, long trail that is still a-winding, of Beats and Zen-ers and Pure Breaders and the rest: of whom one must make the radical criticism, however reactionary it may appear—that they lack the humility which accepts the limits of the possible.

Yeats is not quite in this galley. He had some qualities—not necessarily good ones, for they included vanity and sensuality—which kept him anchored in the real world of men. Yet even with him, the argument of Reid's *The Lyric of Tragedy,* which is essentially that Yeats's work is of truly tragic quality and stature, can be maintained only by distinguishing between tragedy as an art-form and tragedy as "the tragic sense of life"—and crediting Yeats with the latter. And this, we are told, Yeats achieved through a process of "elevating himself and his friends into dramatis personae, creatures of representative fable or myth." "Yeats's failure with Maud was for him a prime piece of evidence supporting his cumulative conviction that life is tragic. . . . [He had a] sense of the grandeur of his love for Maud Gonne and the immense and special poignancy of his failure there. He and Maud had really failed at a priestly and sacramental office." Surely this is absurdly, anti-climactically egoistic? If Miss Gonne had said Yes instead of No, presumably "life" might *not* have been tragic? But Reid accepts it with hardly a pinch of critical salt. He is aware, I suspect, that some cynic will suggest that true tragedy should rest on a basis just a trifle wider than the refusal of Miss X to go to bed with Mr. Y, and he tries to save his case by a distinction between tragedy dramatic and tragedy lyrical. But this won't do. The distinction is not formal, but capital. When you make a real tragedy, when you bend your private agonies into the framework of an objective story, when you call your jealousy Othello and your rage Lear, you are doing much more than putting them in fancy dress. You are submitting them to a discipline. Yeats could not do that. And neither could Blake. For he too magnified his personal disagreements into cosmic-symbolic wars in heaven, as he did with futile, fussy, inoffensive Mr. Hayley:

> Blake met Hayley in 1800, and went to live at Felpham under his patronage in the fall of that year. The gradual estrangement which took place between them was partly reflected in the struggle between Palamabron (Blake) and Satan (Hayley). . . .

No reverence for Blake's real genius should prevent us from saying that this is nonsense, mad nonsense, evil nonsense. (It is evil because when Blake talked about Satan and Hell, he meant it. He was not being metaphorical, and he was not being funny.) Blake has refused the discipline of humour and humility: the classical discipline. He was never tired of railing at "the Greek spirit of compromise and adjustment" or at the modern science which he saw as "a consolidation of Greek speculation into an experimental philosophy." Donne before him, as Williamson points out, had rejected the models of literary clas-

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sicism; but there is no parallel here with Blake, for Donne turned away from the Renaissance-classical discipline in the name of another, the medieval-scholastic, not in the name of a new anarchy. Yet it is true that the real metaphysical verse, the verse of the School of Donne, ceased to be possible when the spirit of modern science won the day. "In the place of wit and verbalized intellect," writes Alvarez, "Bacon substituted predictable and controllable techniques . . . Bacon proposed a levelling out of the understanding by scientific techniques which made all men equal before nature." It is strange that the movement which finally snuffed out medieval scholasticism and the poetry derived from it should have been also the movement most hated by the anarchic romanticism of Blake; for Blake hated too, almost as savagely, the authoritative and rigorous intellectualism of medieval Catholicism, or indeed any system which attempted to harmonize Church with State and spiritual with temporal.

But Science was his real enemy, the "Satan's Trinity" of Bacon Newton-Locke: his enemy and the enemy of that "Prophetic Inspiration" which for him was poetry. By an odd coincidence, Alvarez and Muir describe this "enemy" in phrases remarkably similar. "The apotheosis of 'things' " is the former's phrase for the gospel of the emergent Royal Society in the 1660's; "a world of secondary objects, of finished articles" is the latter's for the world of twentieth-century technology. It destroyed the poetry of the School of Donne, thinks Alvarez; it has virtually destroyed, thinks Muir, or at least made enormously more difficult and less effective, poetry of any kind. What Muir puts in abstract prose like this—

> The difference between the world of the imagination and the world of applied science . . . is so great that the one can hardly understand the other

—is what Blake says through the cosmic struggle between Los and Urizen and in lines such as these—

> O Satan, my youngest born, art thou not Prince of the Starry Hosts
> And of the Wheels of Heaven, to turn the Mills day & night?
> Art thou not Newton's Pantocrator, weaving the Woof of Locke?

Blake was the first, to my knowledge, who saw this as an opposition permanent and incurable; and though I believe that view to be utterly wrong and disastrous, one cannot withhold admiration from the extraordinary insight and foresight which was seeing it more than 150 years ago. Blake had nothing but contempt for those who, like Wordsworth, attempted a reconciliation and compromise and suggested that the "contemplation of Natural Objects" need not always be "deadening to the Imagination." Yet surely it is Wordsworth's earthly humility, and not Blake's cosmic arrogance, which is the model to follow and the hope to pursue—even if, in 1962 far more terribly than in 1802, Blake's vision may seem to be true.

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JOHN SIMON

More Brass Than Enduring[1]

IN POETRY, AS IN THE OTHER ARTS, it is getting harder and harder to tell the sheep from the goats. The reason for this may be that something brand new is happening, a departure so radical as to leave most of us, public and critics alike, far behind. Or it may be that there is such overproduction in the arts that, glutted by torrents of bad and mediocre work, one is too dazed and exhausted to respond freshly, enthusiastically to the good things that come along, as always, rarely. Or could it be that some of the arts have reached a Point of No Turn, from which there is not only no *re*turn, but no turning in any meaningful direction? Let us hope that it is not so, yet is it inconceivable that there should be left no further combinations of words and rhythms, lines and colors, tones and sonorities that are both sufficiently different from what has been done before and beautiful and significant enough to be valid? We have, after all, seen the ends of certain human disciplines: philosophy is no more, having been subsumed—more's the pity—by the exact sciences, psychology, sociology, and even linguistics. Geography is, for all creative purposes, extinct. Astrology has become a joke. It is merely a question of who will kill off theology: the non-believers or the theo-

[1] VIEWS OF JEOPARDY, by *Jack Gilbert*. Yale Univ. Press. $1.25. DEATHS FOR THE LADIES (and other disasters), by *Norman Mailer*. Putnam. $1.95. POEMS, by *Barbara Guest*. Doubleday. $2.95. THE TENNIS COURT OATH, by *John Ashbery*. Wesleyan Univ. Press. $1.25, paper; $3.50, cloth. THANK YOU AND OTHER POEMS, by *Kenneth Koch*. Grove Press. $1.95. FOR LOVE, by *Robert Creeley*. Scribner's. $3.50. THE JACOB'S LADDER, by *Denise Levertov*. New Directions. $1.55. SELECTED POEMS, by *Francis Golffing*. Macmillan. $1.65. POEMS, by *Francis Fergusson*. Rutgers Univ. Press. $3.50. THE BOY FROM IOWA, by *Reed Whittemore*. Macmillan. $1.95. MOVIE-GOING AND OTHER POEMS, by *John Hollander*. Atheneum. $1.65. GARLAND FOR THE WINTER SOLSTICE, by *Ruthven Todd*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.00. ADVICE TO A PROPHET AND OTHER POEMS, by *Richard Wilbur*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.75. MY SAD CAPTAINS AND OTHER POEMS, by *Thom Gunn*. Univ. of Chicago Press. $1.50, paper; $2.50, cloth. TORSE 3, by *Christopher Middleton*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.95. THE COLOSSUS AND OTHER POEMS, by *Sylvia Plath*. Knopf. $4.00. NUDE DESCENDING A STAIRCASE, by *X. J. Kennedy*. Doubleday. $2.50. IN PRAISE OF ADAM, by *Reuel Denney*. Univ. of Chicago Press. $3.50. BETWEEN MARS AND VENUS, by *Robert Conquest*. St Martin's Press. $2.95. DROWNING WITH OTHERS, by *James Dickey*. Wesleyan Univ. Press. $1.25, paper; $3.50, cloth. JOURNEY TO A KNOWN PLACE, by *Hayden Carruth*. New Directions. $12.50. FEVER & CHILLS, by *George P. Elliott*. The Stone Wall Press. $8.50. TWENTY POEMS OF GEORG TRAKL, translated by *James Wright* and *Robert Bly*. The Sixties Press. $2.00. IN THE INTERLUDE, by *Boris Pasternak*. Translated by *Henry Kamen*. Oxford Univ. Press. $7.00. COLLECTED POEMS, by *Hugh MacDiarmid*. Macmillan. $6.50. PICTURES FROM BRUEGHEL AND OTHER POEMS, by *William Carlos Williams*. New Directions. $2.25. IN THE CLEARING, by *Robert Frost*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $4.00.

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logians. Many are the crafts that have vanished from the world, and an even greater number of them is on the verge of disappearance. Though our arts have, let us say, survived until now, does that necessarily mean that they will be here forever?

But quite aside from these millenarian speculations, someone might question my initial proposition and wonder whether the good and the bad in, say, poetry are any harder to distinguish today than ever they were. For such doubters I have prepared the following test: State which of the two passages below strikes you as better poetry:

(A)

The tempering, forgotten shrines: four gardens.
Spires and poplars—the white god—where Lilith dances
Wild geese. Horizons.

Wampum and old gold? The golden darkness?
White April dreams, and a sword hidden.
Waters. Attitudes.

(B)

And I am as greedy of her, that the black
Horse of the literal world might come
Directly on me. Perspective. A place

To stand. To receive. A place to go
Into from. The earth by language.

Who can imagine antelope silent
Under the night rain, the Gulf
At Biloxi at night else?

Now that you have made your choice, let me tell you that (A) is a list, in chronological order, of the first fourteen titles in the Yale Series of Younger Poets, with only the punctuation slightly changed. (B) is the middle part of the second poem in *Views of Jeopardy* by Jack Gilbert, the fifty-eighth and current Yale Laureate, the punctuation—and everything else—exactly as Mr. Gilbert wrote it, alas.

Let us assume that you are a person of discernment and were able to tell in fairly short order which is the poem and which the imposture (I myself am not quite sure yet); the mere fact that such a question of poetic quality, indeed quiddity, could be raised is significant: can you imagine being asked to choose between Yeats's latest lyric and his shopping list? Granted that a list of book titles is not quite the same as a shopping list, neither is Mr. Gilbert quite Yeats. But it is precisely because Mr. Gilbert is a by no means untalented poet that I am so concerned: should a poem he puts into second place in his volume so closely resemble that *hasard* which threatens to abolish and supplant the poet's *coup de dés*?

In pursuit of his craft, Mr. Gilbert is sometimes cold, as in the pas-

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sage quoted, sometimes getting lukewarm by ably digesting such influences as Auden ("In Perugino we have sometimes seen our country./ Incidental, beyond the Madonna, the mild hills . . .") or Lawrence ("You know I am serious about the whales./ Their moving huge through that darkness,/ Silent."); but there are times when he gets hot, as in the succinct "On Growing Old in San Francisco" (and no matter if the second verse reminds us of "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz"):

> Two girls barefoot walking in the rain
> Both girls lovely, one of them is sane
> Hurting me softly
> Hurting me though
> Two girls barefoot walking in the snow
> Walking in the white snow
> Walking in the black
> Two girls barefoot never coming back

It might be best now to get out of the way the various anti- and non-poets, whose tribe, regrettably, increases. Prominent here is a volume by Norman Mailer, *Deaths for the Ladies (and other disasters)*. Mr. Mailer's *ars poetica* reads as follows: "Poems/ written by/ masochists/ flop like cows/ in the meadow. . . . Poems/ should be like pins/ which prick the skin/ of boredom/ and leave/ a glow/ equal in its pride/ to the gait/ of the sadist/ who stuck/ the pin/ and walked away." Clearly, in Mr. Mailer's philosophy the pin is mightier than the word—and so far as Mr. Mailer's own words are concerned, this is undoubtedly so. Again, we read "Art/ cannot/ recover/ what was lost/ to the cowardice/ of the/ knife. . . ." And "O sweet tear/ of the victim/ blind am I/ with love/ for thee." Or, fondly repeated twice, "So long/ as/ you/ use/ a knife,/ there's/ some/ love/ left." And, most concisely, a whole poem which runs: "It's me/ or/ my readers." It is a simple world, conveniently divisible into sadists, who write this sort of thing, and masochists, who read it. But at least no one can accuse Mr. Mailer of not practicing what he preaches.

If there is anything worse, however, than this, it is a kind of non-poetry made up of sheer free association, and, I suspect, not even honest free association at that, but deliberate cultivation of the meaningless, a willed collocation of the disconnected, unspontaneous and ungrammatical: the arrogant assumption that *disjecta membra* can make you *poeta*. I am about to speak of three poets all of whom have been connected with the action painters—writing rave reviews of, catalogues for, and poem-paintings with, them—indeed, living with them in closest intimacy. These abstract expressionists in words are every bit as undistinguished and indistinguishable as their confreres of the drip, dribble and squirt. There is, first, Barbara Guest with her volume *Poems,* a

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typical one of which begins, "All grey-haired my sisters/ what is it in the more enduring/ clime of Spring that waits?/ The tiger his voice once prayerful/ around the lax ochre sheen/ finally in withering sleep/ its calendar,/ Relatives/ delicious plumages your scenery/ has a black musical depth/ the cardinal flies into. . . ."

An even more expert *tachiste* is John Ashbery, whose previous volume, *Some Trees,* won the Yale Poetry Prize. Since 1956, however, Mr. Ashbery has perfected his verse to the point where it almost never deviates into—nothing so square as sense!—sensibility, sensuality, or sentences. Here is the opening of the title poem in *The Tennis Court Oath:*

> What had you been thinking about
> the face studiously bloodied
> heaven blotted region
> I go on loving you like water but
> there is a terrible breath in the way all of this
> You were not elected president, yet won the race
> All the way through fog and drizzle
> When you read it was sincere the coasts
> stammered with unintentional villages the
> horse strains fatigued I guess . . . the calls . . .
> I worry
>
> the water beetle head
> why of course reflecting all
> then you redid you were breathing . . .

Bearing in mind the revolutionary title, I surmised that this was a poem in code, encoded in which lay some powerful anarchic message. Summoning up all my cryptographic skills, I proceeded to read the poem backwards; to read only every third, seventh, or tenth word; to skip every odd, or even, line; alas, every way made exactly as much sense as the one in which the thing is printed, and that, of course, is scarcely enough. In another poem, "Europe," which seems to be autobiographical, section ten reads, in its entirety, "He had mistaken his book for garbage." I do not think it is up to us to know better than the poet.

Last of this trio from the so-called "New York School" is Kenneth Koch, whose *Thank You and Other Poems* comes to us from Mr. Barney Rosset's budding Grove. A typical piece of Koch (from "Pregnancy") runs like this: "Shall any laundry be put out to dry/ With so many yellow and orange sequins falling through the air?/ Yes, the donkey has become very corpulent./ Will the blue carpet be sufficiently big to cover the tennis court?/ Down the street walked a midget. 'She's a good looker, hey?'/ He said to a passer-by. O tremulous stomach!/ We've been spending the winter in Paris . . ./ It rains on the sweater . . ./ I've a dog in

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my stomach!" (Ellipses the author's.) After ninety-five pages of this, what stomach would remain untremulous?

This brings us to a pair of other poets who belong to the radical left wing, viz. to those anthologized in Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*. The first of these is Robert Creeley, whose poetry 1950-1960 appears in the volume *For Love*. Mr. Creeley's poems have two main characteristics: (1) they are short; (2) they are not short enough. In his more gnomic mode, he gives us poems like "Not Now": "I can see you,/ hairy, extended, vulnerable,/ but how did you get up there./ Where were you going all alone,/ why didn't you wait/ for the others to come home/ to go too, they would/ have gone with you." More often, however, Mr. Creeley ("One of the very few contemporaries with whom it is essential to keep current"—Hugh Kenner) provides tender lyrics like "The Way":

> My love's manners in bed
> are not to be discussed by me,
> as mine by her
> I would not credit comment upon gracefully.
>
> Yet I ride by the margin of that lake in
> the wood, the castle,
> and the excitement of strongholds;
> and have a small boy's notion of doing good.
>
> Oh well, I will say here,
> knowing each man,
> let you find a good wife too,
> and love her as hard as you can.

Besides ignorance of the English language, we find here that apotheosis of love in the last line of the poem, so characteristic of Mr. Creeley and other poets of his orientation, on which I commented in *Audit,* in a review of Mr. Allen's anthology: "You cannot capture love by sprinkling salt on its tail, or even by liberally sprinkling the tails of your poems with its name. Indeed, all this dragging in of love as a *deus ex vagina* is only a sorry testimonial to the essential lovelessness of these poets: the grand climax proves merely a grand climacteric."

The other related poet is a particularly sad case. Denise Levertov was well on her way to becoming a pleasant, minor British neo-romantic poet when an American had to come along, marry and transport her to San Francisco, and add to her already complex Judaeo-Celtic heritage the insalubrious atmosphere of the Bay Area's beatnikism: Mishna and Mabinogion, if you will; but then on to Zen and mishmash? So now, in her *The Jacob's Ladder,* behold verse like "I hear/ the tide turning. Last/ eager wave over-/ taken and pulled back/ by moon-ache. The great knots/ of moon-awake energy/ far out." Again, ". . . who can say/

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the crippled broom-vendor yesterday, who passed/ just as we needed a new broom, was not/ one of the Hidden Ones?" Or this, which reads like a parody, "The authentic! I said/ rising from the toilet seat./ The radiator in rhythmic knockings/ spoke of the rising steam./ The authentic, I said/ breaking the handle of my hairbrush as I/ brushed my hair in/ rhythmic strokes: That's it,/ that's joy, it's always/ a recognition, the known/ appearing fully itself, and/ more itself than one knew." The end here is not without merit, but can do little to mitigate the triviality and grossness of the beginning. On the whole, the poems in *The Jacob's Ladder* can be fair to middling, like the title poem, "The Rainwalkers," "Partial Resemblance," "Night on Hatchet Cove," "A Solitude," and "Illustrious Ancestors," or pretentious and lumpish, like "In Memory of Boris Pasternak," "The Well," "The Necessity," "Matins," "The Tulips," and "During the Eichmann Trial." Let it be noted also that Miss Levertov's free verse is often uncompelling in its movement, and frequently as arbitrary and ostentatious in its line breaks as William Carlos Williams's at its worst. "She is the most subtly skillful poet of her generation," Kenneth Rexroth informs us, and adds, "the most profound, the most modest, the most moving." The only way I can make sense of these four superlatives is to assume that the first ("most skillful") is used to keep the other three well hidden.

We come now to a few poets on the other side of the fence, where the grass, however, is not necessarily greener. It is customary to manhandle these poets by calling them academic; but a closer examination will show that some of them go to the most desperate lengths to avoid academicism, and are, frequently, only too successful. If Francis Golffing, in his *Selected Poems,* were content with attempting less, he could achieve a good deal more—rather like Miss Levertov on the other side of the ivy. But Mr. Golffing is at great pains to produce things like "And spray will settle in your halcyon hair,/ Deriding the barrette where white birds kiss," when he can manage such elegant though conservative felicities as this, of October leaves: "Such swarming embassies/ As fall will organize/ Moving toward flocks of snow/ From half-remembered flies." Francis Fergusson's *Poems,* on the other hand, stay well within their range: the early Pounding and Elioteering, and the later contemplative pallidness of pieces like "The Autumn God: In Time of War," which concludes, "Brief and timeless is the sheen/ Of the dry grass, seen, unseeing, while/ Unseen between the seasons the void/ Is void: unreal/ Its image of death in the bright spears of grass,/ Unreal and trivial (after/ The sombre triumphant surrender) as/ The detritus of war or pleasure." A prothalamion for his daughter elicits some pleasantly authentic touches of humanity, though not especially of poetry, but an elegy on his wife's death is marred by inveighings against his bugbear, "the City," which, except for their more anemic quality, might come out of Verhaeren or Sandburg.

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As Mr. Fergusson ekes out his slender poetic output with a play in prose (made scarcely more poetic by his calling it "a theater lyric"), so Reed Whittemore publishes a volume, *The Boy From Iowa,* that is one-third sophisticated poetry and two-thirds sophisticated prose, though it takes a practiced eye to tell where the one stops and the other begins. Mr. Whittemore's poems are urbane, breezy, witty, but on subjects of such rarefied nature as Browning's ghastly drama or the otiosity of a Renaissance Man *manqué*—yet, at least, he is funny and does not take himself more seriously than his topics. When, however, he does attempt to be even mildly portentous, things go ill, as in two mock epics which only seem long but are, actually, interminable.

John Hollander's attempts at getting away from the label "academic," which, I understand, was pasted in every copy of his first volume, consist, in his new book, *Movie-Going,* chiefly in the absence of sestinas, in picking up Gregory Corso's gauntlet about no academic poetry beginning with the words "fried shoes," in the presence of a sonnet to the Marx Brothers' female foil, and, of course, in the title poem, "Movie-Going." (It should be noted, however, that intimate knowledge of old movies and movie actors has become the paramount peak of academic snobbery.) Otherwise, here is the usual foison of the academic prestidigitator, from syllabic to shaped verse, from villanelles to Anglo-Saxonizing alliterative verse, from the usual experiments with slant rhyme to the no less usual "modern" adaptation of Catullus to prove that any shoe Fitts. There is also every type of poem, from a thirty-page piece in praise of Apthorp House (the master's residence of Adams House at Harvard), with deftly turned compliments to its current occupant, to the customary *New Yorker* poem about shells in a seascape—an item that seldom fails to sell to that publication, and, among poets to be discussed, Ruthven Todd and Sylvia Plath also have in their new collections the seascape-with-shells poem duly reprinted from *The New Yorker.* But to Mr. Hollander's misfortune, nothing stales more quickly than such a custom of infinite variety behind which there is no conviction: no need for writing poetry, only the compulsion to be a Poet. Mr. Hollander's typical tone is condescending: "Going inside the cottage was/ *sillier* even than staying/ out/ here in the first place." Or "Their light housekeeping doomed always to leave each room,/ House or garden or land *messier* than the last." Again, "the unlikely house/ Carries, stuck to its roof, a/ Lantern, just as if *any fool/ Knew* 'a house plus a light equals a lighthouse.' " Or, again, "imaginary *birdies/* Sang grim songs from the lamp-posts"; also references galore to "goodies," "playing footy" (shouldn't it be "footsie"?) and so on. Mr. Hollander's characteristic strategy is inflation of the insignificant (e.g., minor movie actors magniloquently identified with planets and their mythic counterparts—a particularly seedy bit of euhemerism) or deflation of the significant ("And lay there freezing slowly in the dying light/ With which the changing world outside *peeped* in" [all italics

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mine]). Furthermore, there are inappropriate cutenesses like "dark night/ immanent and imminent both," or, of an old man carrying a girl piggy-back, "Bottom/ To bottom will the no-backed beast run," or Nabokovian trick-parentheses like "Down to the Zoo ('Hello, Yak') or along/ Apartment house-lined chasms," and many more. Poetry cannot be produced by such frivolity, because lack of genuine feeling for the subject cannot be compensated for by any amount of patronizing cleverness.

I dwell so long on Mr. Hollander's verse because it seems to me symptomatic of what ails much of American poetry, and because Mr. Hollander appears to me too intelligent a writer not to settle down sooner or later in the niche where he belongs: critical prose. With Ruthven Todd's selected poems, *Garland for the Winter Solstice,* we come to the endemic disease of British poetry, suggested by the very title: genteel, *faisandé* amateurishness. Mr. Todd's poems are, for the most part, program notes to the work and lives of painters or poets, or elaborate catalogues of shells, mushrooms, wines, weeds—even of the modes of great men's dying—full of exotic lore. But if this, from "Trout Flies," be poetry,

> And tongue familiarly, Black Midge and August Dun,
> Blue Upright, Cinnamon Sedge, Coachman and Pheasant Tail,
> Red Ant, Red Hackle, Furnace Palmer, and Yellow Sally, in the sun,
> Ghost, Green Midge, Half Stone and, sometimes, Never Fail,

then one of the greatest poets in the English language is Sears Roebuck. Mr. Todd also offers some hectic reminiscences of his Edinburgh childhood, of war-crossed love, and he, too, can deliver sestinas, amphisbaenics and pantoums. But neither cultured catalogues nor cultivated metrical rugosities can disguise the thinness of most of these poems. When, however, Mr. Todd picks certain playfully quaint topics, like "William Cowper's Hares" or "The Louse," he can be charming, as also in this sestet from a sonnet to "An Upper, Left Central, Incisor" that fell out:

> Oh, tooth, companion for thirty-five odd and curious years,
> My extra hand, clipper of ends of thread and bits of string,
> I shudder as I feel your neighbours shake; I share their fears
> Of the bright mechanics that the future now must bring.
> Suffering alone, I tongue your obvious, though healing, gap,
> Lamenting, as perpetually, unwanted changes in a private map.

Three impatiently awaited volumes have proven disappointing. In Richard Wilbur's *Advice to a Prophet,* of thirty-one pieces six are translations, three are miniatures, and one is a musical-comedy lyric. But the problem is not quantity; rather it is the quality of the remaining twenty-one poems. Of these only three seem to me to come off: "A Summer Morning," "A Hole in the Floor," and "In the Smok-

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ing-Car." For the rest, we have poems that have a nice beginning ("The Aspen and the Stream," "October Maples, Portland") or a nice end ("Next Door") or a nice this or that; others, however, fail for aiming too high ("Advice to a Prophet," "She") without matching the intentions with performance, or for not aiming high enough ("The Stop," "A Christmas Hymn"). Now a poet of Richard Wilbur's distinction need not continually surpass himself, but neither should he fall disconcertingly short of his standard. Mr. Wilbur's current problem seems to be (not unlike Robert Lowell's) one of transportation. He is trying to transport his verse from the poetic trance to ports of call of reality, but whereas in the demesne of pure poetry his excellence remains unchallenged, in the domains of contemporaneity his assurance is less than complete. Consider the qualitative differences between stanzas 2 and 5 of "Fall in Corrales":

> Charms, all charms, as in stillness of plumb summer
> The shut head lies down in bottomless grasses,
> Willing that its thought be all heat and hum,
> That it not dream the time passes.
>
> . . .
>
> Our desires dwelt in the weather as fine as bomb-dust;
> It was our sex that made the fountains yield;
> Our flesh fought in the roots, and at last rested
> Whole among cows in the risen field.

As for the translations, they are, as usual, deft and commendably faithful: in an age of "versions," they remain, laudably, translations. However, in Guillén's "Death, From a Distance," I feel that "pear" lacks the strict universality of "fruto," and the final "its uncapricious law" is weaker than "su ley, no su accidente." Again, in Quasimodo's "The Agrigentum Road," it makes little sense to translate "carraio" as "wagon-maker," and "moon-washed" is more conventional than "nitido di luna." (The title Wilbur chose is misleading, too; it suggests that the poet is on the way to Agrigentum, whereas, in fact, he meditates inside that ruined city.) In Nerval's "Anteros," "My face, like Abel's bloody—alas!—and white,/ Burns red by turns with Cain's unsated fires!" is an impoverished rendering of "Sous la pâleur d'Abel, hélas! ensanglantée,/ J'ai parfois de Caïn l'implacable rougeur!" And an important point is missed by translating the final "ressème" with the non-repetitive "sow."

Our second disappointment is Thom Gunn's new volume. This remarkable young English poet gets worse as he becomes more sucked into America: his *Fighting Terms* was a brilliant first book of verse, *The Sense of Movement* a fair second, and now *My Sad Captains* a poor third. The opening piece, "In Santa Maria del Popolo" is impressive enough, despite overtones of that kind of tourist-poem mass-produced by Miss Adrienne Rich; other pieces tend to be explorations of an in-

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verted, leather-jacketed underworld, occasionally, like "The Feel of Hands," powerful, but more often, like "L'Epreuve" and the two "Modes of Pleasure," dreary.

The third disappointment is *Torse 3,* a first book by another English poet, Christopher Middleton. Individual poems by him in magazines always gave me the feeling that a genuine sensibility was at work here, and that if only I were reading some other poem of his, it would surely satisfy me completely. Well, *Torse 3* ranges from obscurity to banality, and the two successful poems, "Amigos de Corazon" and "At Porthcothan," are both of them narrative, which I consider the least interesting form of poetry. Nonetheless, some of "Alba After Six Years," the first stanza of "Waterloo Bridge," and parts of "Rhododendron Estranged in Twilight," for all its indebtedness to Rilke, hold out promise of better things to come.

There are also five happier events to report. There is, for instance, Sylvia Plath's first volume, *The Colossus.* Miss Plath has some of the excusable faults of youth: the attempt to blow up the tiniest personal experience into an event of vast, universal and, preferably, mythic importance; intoxication with the rare word which she displays with *nouveau riche* ostentation; and obsessive fiddling with certain forms and devices, e.g., *terza rima.* But with time—the deepening of perception and strengthening of control—these temporary improprieties can become the proper pursuits of poetry: holding nature's immensities in the poem's pocket mirror; redeeming the language; and letting the parallel rails of form lead on to a meeting point in, and with, infinity. When Miss Plath resists pretentiousness, she achieves glistening, evocative poems like "Snakecharmer," "Spinster," "Man in Black," or that endearing tribute to porcine pomp, "Sow." And consider this stanza from "Blue Moles":

> Nightly the battle-shouts start up
> In the ear of the veteran, and again
> I enter the soft pelt of the mole.
> Light's death to them: they shrivel in it.
> They move through their mute rooms while I sleep,
> Palming the earth aside, grubbers
> After the fat children of root and rock.
> By day, only the topsoil heaves.
> Down there one is alone.

Another lively first volume is X. J. Kennedy's *Nude Descending a Staircase.* Mr. Kennedy is a curious cross between the *boulevardier* and the Metaphysical: he believes in the well-made, witty but significant, poem, donning its top hat and its Donne. When this blend comes off, as in "First Confession," the second section of "Faces From a Bestiary," "Landscapes With Set-Screws," parts of "Inscriptions After Fact," "Rondeau," "Conspirator My Rose," "At the Ghostwriter's Deathbed,"

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and the title poem, the effect is rousing. But when the wit fizzles or the elegance gets creased, things look sorry indeed. Even a relatively successful poem like "Solitary Confinement" can leave us ill at ease, because so serious a subject is handled with a facetiousness under which one looks in vain for a deeper humanity or profounder pessimism. And I must say I am worried to find Mr. Kennedy's work reminding me in a dozen little ways of Mr. Donald Hall's—who but Mr. Hall could have written the line "You wake one day to find yourself abstract"?—except that it was written by Mr. Kennedy. It is all right for young poets to emulate and resemble the great poets of their day—but to sound deceptively like Donald Hall is to be more deceived than deceiving. To illustrate Kennedy at his best, here is the end of "On a Child Who Lived One Minute":

> O let us do away with elegiac
> Drivel! Who can restore a thing so brittle,
> So new in any jingle? Still I marvel
> That, making light of mountainloads of logic,
> So much could stay a moment in so little.

Probably the most tantalizing poet of this batch is Reuel Denney. *In Praise of Adam,* coming twenty-two years after his first collection, contains a good deal that is dashingly or delicately irresistible, and as much or more that is murky, grandiloquent, and dishearteningly uncommunicative. Poems like "Fixer of Midnight," "To the Roman Bridge on Michigan Avenue," "Lady Who Knew a Waterfall, in Trinidad," "Love Song of the Summer Waiter," "Tickle of Labor Day," "Recollections of the Porch," "A Chiffonier With Glass Flowers," and several others in part or whole are remarkable for their freshness, ease, and strange, slightly roundabout way of getting at the essential: to read them is like watching a knife, in slow motion, somersaulting through the air in sheer display, only to see it straighten out suddenly and hit the target with uncanny accuracy. This approach is somehow very European—one thinks of Jacques Prévert or Paul Celan. But when Mr. Denney proposes to write big, as, for instance, in "Keepsake of Below" or "The Man in Oakenwald," the result is dismaying. It is, unfortunately, hard to convey Denney's best in a few lines, but here at least is some of his second best from "A Criticism of Sculpture": "Statue, go back to your rock./ There is little you mean of man/ Whose arm is a rope, whose head/ Is an egg in the frying pan./ His look is a lurk. His word/ Seems a self-hurting machine./ Back, back to your boulder, mock,/ And leave us a leaner scene."

The English poet Robert Conquest (best remembered for his anthology, *New Lines,* which gave rise to that casually fastidious poetry known as the Movement) appears with a new volume of verse, *Between Mars and Venus.* This could have been more aptly called "Between Eros and Apollo," for Mr. Conquest's *beau souci* is the relationship be-

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tween love and creation, between sex and art. He is an excellent literary journalist (witness his recent book, *The Pasternak Affair,* which sheds exemplary clarity on a well-obfuscated issue) and, accordingly, his poetry tends to be more agile and provocative than original or profound. But at his finest he can give us verse like "The obsessions governing art/ Are art itself, philosophy and sex./ And in their fusion verse detects/ The process that it calls the heart." Or, again, "Life finds its way to sing/ Beyond all self, all sense:/ This mere experience,/ This chime of the most real./ Thank you. Thank everything." This may be slight; but it is not to be slighted.

Close on the heels of an extraordinary first book, *Into the Stone,* James Dickey gives us his second, *Drowning With Others,* and we can no longer doubt that we are in the presence of a major talent, a true art. It is not only that for many pages poem after poem is apt to be unabatingly good—"A Dog Sleeping at My Feet," "The Movement of Fish," "The Heaven of Animals," "A Birth"; it is not just that he can be equally impressive on a variety of themes from a scratch acquired in the woods to his father's dying, from a tree house to a lupanar at Pompeii, from a real, closely observed animal to an imagined, fabulous one; nor merely that he can make iambs and anapests—particularly anapests—ripple with the enchantment but not the monotony of streams; nor yet that he can fluently sustain a long poem. These are no mean achievements, but his supreme contribution is the creation of a Dickey cosmos: a landscape into which breathe Dickey plants and in which are ensconced Dickey objects, through which race Dickey meters and metaphors overtaking the slower-moving Dickey animals and people under the gaze of emblematic Dickey-birds. Once one has been admitted *chez* Dickey, one recognizes his fox, "A creature is burning itself/ In a smoke of hair through the bushes"; his child, "An event more miraculous yet/ Is the thing I am shining to tell you./ The child is no more than a child"; his angel of autumn who will come "And deliver the year from its thinking/ To the mindless one color of life"; his country, "When it is still, when it is as still as this,/ It could be a country where no one/ Ever has died but for love."

I am not saying that Dickey does not occasionally lapse into the facile, sometimes for the length of an entire poem: "The Dream Flood," for example, falls horribly flat. But before and after it come poems like "A Screen Porch in the Country" and "The Scratch," and, once again, the world is well found. And what is Dickey's world? A family in easeful accord; love for places as far as Africa or as near as the imagination; affection for animals, though one hunts them, and fondness for men, though they be unknown or dead. And always, whether a waterfall hurtles through the poet's eye or the dead are falling through time, everything is absorbed into a world consisting of pure fundamentals in all their plainness, intricacy, and intimate miraculousness. Dickey's

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poetry is cosmic; whether micro- or macrocosmic, it would be difficult —and needless—to say.

Two de luxe volumes, each containing one long poem, also make their entrances. Hayden Carruth's *Journey to a Known Place* is sheer bluster and humbug, and has probably an even higher rag content than the fancy paper on which it is printed. The only known place it could possibly journey to is the wastebasket. George P. Elliott's *Fever & Chills* is a perfectly valid short story of the kind Mr. Elliott turns out in prose with so much skill, here inexplicably couched in unrhymed, irregular iambic tetrameter. This sheepish fabliau about the dullness of marriage and scarcely lesser dullness of adultery has, along with very much that is prosaic, occasional lapses into poetic grace: "But he had no true competence/ In the uses of solitude," or "Instead, he scrutinized her face/ Like an artifact, he the numb/ Keeper of a wild museum/ Inspecting her in her sadness." On the whole, however, I would not thank James Schevill (as the author does in his dedication) for helping find the meter for this tale which would gain immeasurably by the absence of measure.

Two volumes of verse translations need occupy us only briefly. *In the Interlude* comprises Boris Pasternak's poetry 1945-1960: "The Poems of Yuri Zhivago," and the handful of other verse he wrote up to his death. Henry Kamen's renderings are rhymed, though not so fully as the Russian reprinted on facing pages; conscientious, though forced to make too many concessions to the rhyme; reasonably accurate, although substituting a fair amount of padding for the terseness of the originals; they read like the very best translatorese, but translatorese all the same. They are, in fact, no worse than other translations of Pasternak that we have seen, perhaps even better, but they are not likely to make Robert Frost withdraw his contention that if Pasternak is a great poet, nothing of his in English proves him so.

It is most commendable of James Wright and Robert Bly to offer us *Twenty Poems of Georg Trakl,* but would it not have behooved at least one of the translators to learn some German? Folks who translate "am Weiler vorbei" (past the hamlet) as "a while later," "rührt die Knabenschläfe" (touches the boy's temple) as "troubles the boy's sleep," "[it] dropped down stony precipices" as "stony waterfalls sank away," "the white grandchild prepares a dark future" as "a dark future prepared for the pale grandchild" are beyond the pale, even if in every other way the translations were most competent, which they are not. However, eight mistakes in a fifteen-line poem ("Birth") do constitute a record of sorts.

Lastly, a few words about three books by Old Masters. Hugh MacDiarmid's *Collected Poems* is a volume of nearly five hundred pages. Many of the Scots poems are unreadable because of an inadequate glossary; many of the English ones, because they are turgid propaganda.

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Much of this verse is naive pseudo-folk poetry, much of it dull pamphleteering in verse. But amid the farrago there are poems worthy of the passion and anger of a Dunbar, of the canny satire of an Adam Lindsay. "In the Children's Hospital" and "If I Was Not a Soldier" are inspired poetry of protest; "The Two Parents," "Of My First Love" are lyrics imbued with wisdom and compassion; and "Coronach for the End of the World" is head and shoulders above the Lallans poetry of men like Sydney Goodsir Smith. A scrupulous thinning of the selections and fattening of the glossary could make this a highly estimable book.

William Carlos Williams's *Pictures From Brueghel and Other Poems* includes his previously published volumes, *Journey to Love* and *The Desert Music,* which contain some of his most meaningful and persuasive work. The new poems are less compelling, yet the crossing of Williams's early imagism with an old man's simplicity can be quietly affecting in poems like "The Woodpecker" or "Exercise No. 2." But a note at the end of the book in which Professor Thirlwall talks of "the triadic pattern with a short fourth line to fill out the measure," and, without explaining it, of the "variable foot," is merely the perpetuating of Dr. Williams's delusion that what he writes follows a deep-rooted, ineluctable "Measure," rather than facing the fact that it is simply a perfectly legitimate indulgence of the poet's whims.

Robert Frost's *In the Clearing*
  On travelers will be lost
Who on the least snowy evening
  Push the button "De-Frost."

Yet verse may end in fire
  Or in thick ice be lost,
But it will not expire—
  Or be reborn—from Frost.

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ROBERT BLY

Rewriting vs. Translation[1]

GROVE PRESS HAS PUBLISHED The *Selected Poems* of Pablo Neruda, translated by Ben Belitt. To those familiar with Spanish poetry, Belitt is already known as the man who massacred Lorca's *Poet in New York.* His translation, I think, is responsible for this book's receiving so little attention as it has. What he did was to translate Lorca back into Shakespeare. At the close of a poem on New York, Lorca has the lines:

> Through the suburbs people who cannot sleep are staggering
> As though recently rescued from a shipwreck of blood.

The shipwreck—*un naufragio de sangre*—is somehow inside the blood, as though a ship sunk in the arteries—in any event, it is a new image. Belitt translates these lines:

> And staggering there in the suburbs, the insomniacs,
> as though lately escaped from a bloody disaster.

Belitt has translated it into something we already know, Shakespeare. It is not the language Shakespeare would have used, but a certain illusory literary language. Neruda says, at the close of an anguished poem about the Spanish Civil War, "there are so many things I would like to forget." Belitt translates this: "and legion the things I would give to oblivion." Neruda's poem "Dictators" compares the rise of hatred in South America with the growth of some primitive reptile who grows "with a snout full of ooze and silence." Belitt, after the poem is over, adds on his own initiative the line "and vendetta was born." At other times he translates a phrase into what might be called "Lowellese." Such labor involves jazzing up the translation to make it more "modern," and lowering the speaker one social class. There are two examples of this in Belitt's translation of the great poem "Walking Around." Neruda is saying he is "sick of being a man," yet "it would be beautiful to go down the streets with a green knife / letting out yells until I died of frost." Belitt translates this: "It would be nice / just to walk down the street with a green switchblade handy / whooping it up till I died of the shivers." Belitt doesn't understand that the "green knife" is not a real knife; it is imaginary. The greatness of "Walking Around" depends on the gusto and imaginative strength of the speaker, who is an

[1] SELECTED POEMS OF PABLO NERUDA, translated by *Ben Belitt.* Grove Press. $5.95. SELECTED WORKS, Vol. II, Poetry, by *R. M. Rilke.* Translated by *J. B. Leishman.* New Directions. $6.00. DUINO ELEGIES, by *R. M. Rilke.* Translated by *C. F. MacIntyre.* Univ. of Calif. Press. $1.50. THE SATIRES OF PERSIUS, translated by *W. S. Merwin.* Univ. of Indiana Press. $3.50. POEM OF THE CID, translated by *W. S. Merwin.* New American Library. $ .75. An ANTHOLOGY OF SPANISH POETRY, edited by *Angel Flores.* Doubleday. $1.45.

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adult in full possession of his intelligence and of a strong imagination which never bores him. Belitt makes him into a juvenile delinquent.

Later in the poem, Neruda says he doesn't want to go on "like a root in the shadows," "eating every day." This becomes, in Belitt's translation, "eating three squares a day." This is Lowellese—the use of an artificially lower-class language to jazz up the poem.

At other places, the translations ascend beyond even literary language to the realm of the Stuffed Owl. In his poem "Gentlemen Alone" Neruda describes the wild sexual life on all sides of his "solitary room," and especially two new lovers:

> And now he escorts her to the miserable movies
> Where the heroes are either colts or impassioned princes,
> And he strokes her legs sheathed in their sweet down
> With his warm and damp hands that smell of cigarettes.

Belitt renders these lines as follows:

> They go on to a villainous movie
> where all of the heroes are horses or passionate princes,
> and he dandles a fleecy pubescence of legs
> with his sweltering fingers still rank with tobacco.

"Dandles a fleecy pubescence of legs" surely belongs to the Stuffed Owl. More important, it makes the experience of love between men and women *ugly*. What is strange and beautiful in Neruda becomes something disgusting. Belitt translates Neruda's entire poem as if it were the seduction scene in *The Wasteland*. But Neruda's poem, unlike Eliot's, shows tremendous gusto and love of both persons involved.

In other words, throughout the book there is an inability to see or take Neruda for the original man he is—he is constantly being presented as stale Shakespeare, stale Lowell, or stale Eliot. Because he is not, this book does him a severe injustice. In the original Spanish there is no feeling of "I am sick, please help me" such as we sense in Eliot and in this translation. The original Spanish has a sense of energy, of joy in the imagination, and an abundance of images. Belitt deserves praise for his devotion to poetry; still, he should also have realized that his temperament is not even remotely like Neruda's and that he has no right to rewrite Neruda, especially to weaken him by rewriting. A much better impression of what Neruda is like can be received from H. R. Hays's translation of Neruda in *Twelve South American Poets*, published by Yale, and long out of print—or from Angel Flores' translation of *Residence on Earth* and other poems of Neruda, published in 1946. It is sad that such an important translation as Belitt's should end up like this! Such bad translations are published because there is no real discussion of translations in this country. Grove Press and New Directions apparently think one translation is just as good as another. They imagine translating to be some mechanical process like canning

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beans. Neruda must be translated faithfully. He has an imagination utterly unlike that of any poet who has ever written in English. The poems sweep off, like long tails. His work is moved by masculine energy: it is headlong, ferocious, full of buried coins, heavy seas and pointed emotions—it is what we would have if a pirate wrote poetry.

Rilke seems to me to be the greatest religious poet since Dante. It is strange that in English we have wonderful translators for good writers like Camus, but for the *great* writers, terrible translators. I have for review here Leishman's *Selected Works* of Rilke (Volume II, Poetry) and MacIntyre's *Duino Elegies*. MacIntyre is the main American translator, and Leishman the main English translator, and it is curious that both should show so clearly the faults of each culture. Some wise man said that the most harmful influence on British poetry since the war had been the Leishman translations of Rilke, leading young poets to believe a great poet could be flabby. Here is a direct version of the central stanza of the famous poem "Herbsttag."

> Give the tardy fruits sufficient time to fill;
> Give them two more Southern days,
> Drive them on into greatness, and press
> The last thick sweetness in the heavy wine.

Leishman's version runs:

> Command the last fruits to incarnadine;
> vouchsafe, to urge them on into completeness,
> yet two more south-like days; and that last sweetness,
> inveigle it into the heavy wine.

In "Pont du Carrousel" Rilke describes a blind man who remains stationary despite the bustle:

> He is the Just Man, the immovable,
> Set down here in many tangled streets;
> The dark opening to the Underworld
> Among a superficial generation.

Leishman translates:

> He keeps his movelessly inerrant station
> where manifold perplexing crossways go; . . .

Speaking of his inward life, Rilke says:

> I feel the Hidden has faith in me:
> With my senses, as with birds, I climb
> Into the windy heaven, out of the oak,
> And in the days, full of circles like ponds,
> My feeling sinks, as if standing on fishes.

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Leishman:

> I feel the Never-Namable more dearly:
> with bird-like senses from the trees upspringing,
> into the windy skies I keep emerging,
> and down to broken day of ponds, submerging
> as though on fishes' backs, my feeling goes.

Some of these translations are incredible. The long literary, latinate words are like some terrible jam Leishman can't keep away from. In another poem, Rilke says, "If it were only completely quiet once. . . ."

> Then I could think you through even to your edge
> with a thousand-armed thought
> and have you (just for the length of a smile)
> in order to give you away to all living things
> like thanks.

This becomes in Leishman's version:

> Then in one thousandfold excogitation
> right to your topmost verge I'd come to guess you
> and (just the lasting of one smile) possess,
> and out to all things living would largess you
> like gratefulness.

The last two lines in the German are:

> *um dich an alles Leben zu verschenken*
> *wie einen Dank.*

Such examples could be multiplied indefinitely. It is impossible for Leishman to use simple words. Instead, he uses long words to conceal the thought. Except for the Spender-Leishman *Duino Elegies* translation, reprinted here, this book is of no value. In fact, it is a positive disservice. It was a mistake for New Directions to import it.

MacIntyre's personality is very unlike Leishman's. MacIntyre is a no-nonsense, scientific type. He labors under the strange illusion that he is more robust and fitted for life than Rilke. In other words, he thinks Rilke was a sissy, and a good hard treatment by a translator will straighten him out. In his "Life of the Virgin Mary" Rilke mentions a unicorn, conceived without intercourse by a deer who had seen Mary. In his notes MacIntyre objects, "I find difficulty in stomaching Rilke's alleged parthenogenesis of the animal." When Rilke's mind is on poetry, MacIntyre's is on facts. MacIntyre has translated a large number of Rilke's poems, and the University of California Press has just published his translation of the *Duino Elegies*.

What we have here to compare, then, are two versions of the Elegies —one done by Leishman and Spender years ago, available in several editions, now reprinted in this New Directions book, and a new version

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by MacIntyre in paperback. Both versions of the tremendously difficult poems are respectable. Both make serious efforts to convey Rilke's meanings and images. The question is, is either of them poetry? Let us compare some lines from the Third Elegy. Rilke is praising the night:

> You stars,
> is it not from you that the lover's delight in the loved one's
> face arises? Does not his intimate insight
> into her purest face come from the purest star?
>
> (Spender-Leishman version)
>
> You stars, is it not from you that the lover's desire
> for the dear face springs? Has he not his tender insight
> into her pure face from the pure constellations?
>
> (MacIntyre version)

The Spender-worked version is superior as poetry; some sense of passion comes through. MacIntyre's is not very convincing. We might compare also the closing lines of the same elegy. Rilke is speaking to a young girl; he is speaking of men:

> Oh, gently, gently
> show him daily an honest, confident task done—guide him
> close to the garden, give him preponderance
> over his nights. . . .
> Withhold him . . .
>
> (Spender-Leishman version)
>
> oh, gently, gently,
> do for his sake a trustworthy day's work.
> Lead him near the garden. Give him
> the preponderance of the nights. . . .
> Restrain him . . .
>
> (MacIntyre version)

Something in this passage is not clear, especially "preponderance" and "withhold." If we study the passage we see it reads roughly:

> oh lightly, lightly
> do a lovely task for him each day, a serious one—lead him
> over here near the garden, give him the large mass
> of the nights. . . .
> Don't let him go. . . .

The last phrase suddenly opens into a new idea. Rilke thought that one of the few helps to man in his spiritual life is night. Its richness and quiet are an example to him. Woman can lead man near the nights—let him see what their nourishment and substance are. If

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woman does not help man, he is imagined as wandering off into sterile and endless emptiness. This is why Rilke says to the girl, "Don't let him go." Rilke expresses these ideas in letters and poems. Both the MacIntyre and the Leishman-Spender versions are accurate translations of the German phrase "Verhalt ihn" by the *dictionary,* but not by meaning. To translate one must have a dictionary or know the language, but one must be interested also in Rilke's ideas. None of these men is really interested in Rilke's ideas. MacIntyre, of course, is sure he understands. As he says of the Fourth Elegy: "There is nothing at all in the elegy which is difficult to understand." Of the elegies as a whole he says: "Although the style, sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation are arbitrary and often irritating, even controversial, their unraveling is worthwhile." We understand that Rilke has failed the translator here in some way. Too bad. Rilke is still not translated. The fault is an arrogance that will not learn from Rilke, or—in the end—even respect him.

Indiana University Press has published W. S. Merwin's translations of the satires of Persius. I can't praise these translations enough. They are the best I have seen from Latin poetry. The purpose of translation, as I understand it, is to convey the meaning. If the reader wishes to have the meter and sound he has to read the original. Merwin conveys the meaning and the emotion magnificently. He draws on a tremendous range of reading and of diction—American slang, literary jargon —to convey Persius' ideas. The poems are accurate and yet come alive naturally. Persius' main quality is insubordination. He has hair-raising differences of opinion with the Court, and with the "Roman way of life." What Persius is doing in the first satire is mocking the Audens and Wheelocks unmercifully:

> Well, anyway
> There's elegance in the recent verse, and suavity
> Instead of the crude old style. When you think how they manage
> To round out a line with "Berecynthian Attis,"
> Or "the dolphin then clove cerulean Nereus," or
> Thus, "from the long Appenines we borrow a rib."

The second person in the poem cries "Oh arms and the man!" and asks for more.

> Again, "The Maenad, ready to rein in the lynx
> With braids of ivy, redoubles the Dionysian
> Cry, and reverberant Echo returns it.

Later he says their work is good "for anchoring smoke." There are other attacks. If Persius were living today he would have a satire mocking Rockefeller. His ferocity against the ruling ideas reminds one

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of Rimbaud. Unlike Rimbaud, however, he was an ascetic, a very sober man, a serious scholar of Stoic thought. He died of illness at twenty-eight and these six satires are his total surviving work. Merwin's new translation is the best translation of them by many times.

Merwin's verse translation of *The Cid*, done several years before the Persius translation, and published first by Las Americas Press, has now been reprinted by New American Library as a paperback. *The Cid* is really not an epic in the same sense as the *Iliad* or *Beowulf* are. It is a narrative of some war manoeuvres led by a great man. The poetry in *The Cid* is not so good as in Persius; the translator does not do so much with it—there is not so much one *can* do with it. Once the information is gotten across, telling us where the Cid is going next, and the conversations rendered simply, the job is over. The version is published with the Spanish facing. The translation is a good job, with a fine introduction.

Angel Flores has a sort of Anthology factory going. Every week he publishes a new one. Anchor is publishing a series of anthologies of poetry in foreign languages, edited by Flores. The first in this group, the French, was pretty good. The German, that followed, was terrible, and this one—the Spanish—is just as bad. An increasing number of translations are signed "Kate Flores," and they are very poor. The translations in this anthology are full of such phrases as these: "suffering find surcease," "balm that for my torment," "myriad Waves," "immune to sentiment," "overcast by leaden nimbuses," "ultimate aniline," "the wretched to oblivion." This is the fault of Flores. Either he does not know English well enough to recognize archaic and dead language when he sees it, or he does not bother. Perhaps he does so many anthologies he has no time to do them well. This one, at least, is very sloppy. A fine twenty-page translation of a long Machado poem by Denise Levertov, beautifully done, simply looks out of place. The best translators in the book, besides Levertov, are John Haines, Rachel Benson, Robert O'Brien, and James Wright. The worst—and those with the most poems—are William Davis, Kate Flores, and Muriel Kittel. The result is a wasted opportunity. The outstanding quality of Spanish verse, in comparison with American, is delicacy. This is the quality Flores least brings out. For those who are interested in Spanish poetry, I would advise them by all means to buy instead the *Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*. It is cheaper and many times better than the Anchor book, and sensitive prose translations are given at the bottom of the pages.

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ROGER SALE

The Old Apologists

THE NEWS DID NOT STAY news long enough, I fear, for Richard Foster's book to have the vogue it might have enjoyed a few years ago.[1] *The New Romantics* is about the major American New Critics; it is not a very good book, but it has more good things in it than most books of its kind. Ten years ago any synthesis as simple and judicious as Mr. Foster's would have helped clear some of the stale air that pervaded the atmosphere of conversations about the New Criticism. But it turns out that something happened, perhaps just between the time Mr. Foster finished his thesis and this book was published, that makes his claims for his subject—"a phenomenon of major importance in modern literary history," "the chief movement for literary humanism of this century"—seem rather silly.

Time was, of course, when a book on I. A. Richards, R. P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, and John Crowe Ransom (to name only the major figures in *The New Romantics*) would have been not only news but an invitation to a fight. When Mr. Foster and I were in college and graduate school, people really talked about these men. I remember heated and boring debates about Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" and about W. R. Keast's attack on Robert Heilman's *This Great Stage*. I remember buying a copy of *Language as Gesture* and spending a long bus trip home trying to understand it. I remember the shock of first reading *Practical Criticism* and my shame at discovering that "I weep like a child for the past" was a line of Lawrence's. I remember fingers pointed at older teachers who did not "work with the text" and who thought that texture had something to do with baby food. I am quite certain my experience was like Mr. Foster's because I even remember meeting him in a hotel room in Washington where we were simultaneously interviewed for a job by an encrusted old man who made us smile grimly as he told us that Howells was not really an old fogey. Mr. Foster and I are still young men, but these recollections make me feel nothing quite so strongly as that those days were a long time ago.

But even so, this much can be claimed: the New Critics, like almost every writer on literature who came of age between the wars, were candidates for the vacant job at the Vicarage. They originally assumed their priestlike task by accepting, with what now seems like profound naivete, Richards' redactions of Arnold's declarations about Literature and Science. They spoke of literature as the only possible means of cultural survival; they fought with scholars and aestheticians in the name of the spirit; they claimed *Understanding Poetry* as the great

[1] THE NEW ROMANTICS, by *Richard Foster*. Indiana University Press. $5.75.

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liberating document for the teaching of literature; they wrote with great contempt for anyone who did not see they were trying to save the world, assuming (as most of them did not) that it could be saved. They were, thus, pompous, humorless, enlightened men, our representatives for a decadent romanticism that had been brought to England from France slightly earlier by Yeats, Pound, and Eliot. Allen Tate wrote in 1942 that:

> We are witnessing in America today an exhaustive study of poetic language such as criticism has not attempted either here or in Europe in any previous age. Whether this means that we shall get better poetry or better criticism, or both, it is too soon to know; if we find after a generation that we have got neither, it will be too late to do anything about it.

All the pretentious sonority of the New Criticism is here, learned partly from Eliot and partly from the habits of Southern gentlemen. Tate and the others assumed quite simply that they were part of a revolution and that what they did mattered, for better or worse.

Although Mr. Foster perhaps would not put the case this way, his book offers many buttresses for such an argument. But it is precisely this claim, of theirs and of Mr. Foster's for them, that cannot be made "after a generation." Excluding their own literature and their own criticism, they seem to have had a genuine and lasting effect only on the pedagogy of second-rate teachers and on the structure of second-rate novels. If the world has been made a safer place for literature since 1930, I think any survey must show it is not Richards, Blackmur, Ransom, Tate, or Cleanth Brooks we have to thank. The outstanding critical achievement of the period is the resuscitation of Milton as the result of almost a dozen fine books written from almost as many different points of view. But among older living critics, the outstanding ones seem to be Dr. Leavis, William Empson, Northrop Frye, C. S. Lewis, and Yvor Winters, none of whom is more than tangentially a part of the New Criticism. Furthermore, in recent years a flock of books has been written by men now in their forties, all of which are more sober and witty, more dedicated to saying the right things about individual books and authors, than anything produced by a New Critic—one thinks of *Romantic Image, Purity of Diction in English Verse, Strains of Discord, The Rise of the Novel,* and *The Invisible Poet* right off, but the list could be extended for some time. These books owe very little of their success to the New Criticism, and when their authors take issue with their elders, they turn to what they consider the large game and attack Eliot, Leavis, and Lewis. It would seem that the endless battles with the neo-Humanists, the positivists, the neo-Aristotelians, and the others left the New Criticism with little of permanent value to say for itself. Mr. Foster is quite right to say that the New Critics owe much to the Romantic poets, but it begins to

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appear that a more appropriate comparison to make is with some other respectable but obviously minor group like the Cambridge Platonists.

To speak this way is to attempt, at least, to obviate Mr. Foster's argument, but it can be said in defense that Mr. Foster himself seems to sense the truth of these judgments. He has, for instance, a way of speaking of his subjects which seems at first blush like a vulgar mannerism but which, in the context of a generally judicious argument, finally appears to be a way of trying to disassociate himself from the object at hand. Thus he identifies people with tags that imply that what is being discussed is warfare among various kinds of monkeys: "Philip Wheelwright, philosopher and aesthetician, closely related to the New Critics, and long-standing contributor to their magazines," "Eliseo Vivas, aesthetician and follower of the New Criticism," and most ludicrous of all, "Yvor Winters, the New Critic's New Critic, tended to elevate certain minor Victorian hangovers at the expense of modern deities." To speak of Robert Bridges as a "hangover" may just be a joke, but to talk about "viewpoints" and "that very big word Beauty," as he does elsewhere, can only be the result of having read too much New Criticism. Mr. Foster is, thus, caught; he seems to know that these ostensibly dignified men loved nothing so much as a street fight, yet he is too close to them to do more than indicate their salient features in a language that does more credit to their power to seduce than to his power to remain disinterested. There are, throughout the book, some splendid formulations, but each is hurt by clutter and laxness:

> Of course the hardened philosophical skeptic might still feel that Ransom's final vision of the poetry-as-knowledge doctrine, like so much metaphysical discussion, solves an imaginary problem by a shift in grammar—the conversion of the texture-structure noun-noun duality into the Concrete Universal adjective-noun unity.

This perception seems to me definitive and sufficient to dispense with almost all of Ransom's prose, but Mr. Foster refuses to take this step because he stands too close to Ransom and the others to see the obvious need for doing so.

But, ignoring this criticism, Mr. Foster says almost all the right things about his writers. He says, for instance, that the claim to be made for them is not that they restored chastity and impersonality to the criticism of literature, but just the opposite: they ignored the poetry they were ostensibly discussing and wrote literary essays. Poetry was not their subject but their muse. He sees that Richards' historical pre-eminence in the group prevents the intelligent admirer from insisting too harshly that he never did much of value after *Practical Criticism*. He maintains, best of all, that Blackmur is the most interesting writer of the group although he does not, I think, praise him highly enough at the expense of the others. Beside him, Tate and

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Ransom are boring indeed, and their styles, compared to his, are never capable of the resonance and suggestiveness that finally is essential to the literary essayist who is only incidentally a critic. From the early pieces on modern poets and the magnificent omnibus reviews now in *The Expense of Greatness* to the Byzantine labyrinths of the later essays on James and Eliot, Blackmur has shown that he can elevate the characteristic gestures of the New Criticism to a self-sustaining art. There is, furthermore, a wit in him which is quite uncharacteristic of the others:

> Poetry is the *nous poetikos,* that deep habit of mind, deeper than any sea of hope, calmer in its long swell than any mirror of despair, which imitates in forms and images dear to herself the life she has lived, the life she dreads to live, and the life she aspires to live. She looks everywhere about her, for she contains in her own way everything she sees. "T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"

Mr. Foster quotes this passage as the summa of Romanticism and certainly one can find passages in Coleridge that would enforce this comparison. Yet surely what is most remarkable and most characteristic of Blackmur is that these sentences are little more than a paraphrase of the central stanza of a very unromantic poem, Marvell's "The Garden." It is precisely this closeness to the world's literature, this casual fusion of the writer with everything imaginatively created that makes reading Blackmur so exhilarating and makes his ostensibly impossible style so memorable.

But to end with Blackmur is, for both Mr. Foster and myself, to end in a place far different from the one we thought of when we first heard of the New Criticism. Then it seemed to support unequivocally the idea that criticism was the task of impersonal reading, but *that* movement had its fruit in only two books—*The Well Wrought Urn* and Reuben Brower's *The Fields of Light* (which, sad to say, Mr. Foster never mentions). But as it turned out the New Critics, like everyone they attacked, were more interested in themselves than anything else. This being the case their only justification can be in some great *tour de force* such as is to be found in Blackmur's magnificent unfairness. This is a paradox that Mr. Foster can enunciate but not untangle, but it would seem to be, if at some later time any of the writers in question are still readable, the one problem genuinely worth solving.

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